

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
September 6 & 7, 2014  
John Crosby  
The Mission of CPC  
1 Corinthians 14:24**

I went down a rabbit hole at the 9:30 hour. It's probably a good idea to do it again here. Those of you who are guests who have just started coming, you can tell we are crazy about kids. For us there is no problem with screaming kids, running kids, laughing kids. They are part of the gift God offers us. I say that because those of you who are newer may not realize we have three different places, on the main floor and upstairs, where you and the kids can participate and watch the service and sit inside a soundproof booth. Just something to keep in mind.

We are back in many ways. School's back! This woman over here is saying, "Praise Jesus!" There are 65 to 70 million people from pre-K through post-doctoral work enrolled and back in classes of different kinds. School's back, summer's over. That means football is back! That's a great thing if you are a Notre Dame fan, thank you, Jesus, but it also may be bad news for the Vikings. It's hard to tell. All I know is that today, about 1.3 million people will fill stadiums all around the country and over 1.6 million people will watch those games. Football is huge. School's back and football is back and in some ways, church is back in session as well!

The pollster, Gallup, says there are between 60 million and 120 million of us in this country in these churches today. Sixty million to 120 million is a pretty big spread. Gallup says it's because people lie about whether they go to church or not. "Oh, yeah, I go there three times a month" and yet, there are 350,000 different churches, all kinds of churches people are going back to. When we think of church, we tend to think of the great cathedrals where worship is filled with incense, great liturgy and music, but many more people in the world today are going to what are called house churches. [Slide shown.] These are in China, but there are some on the north side of Minneapolis. In China they are looking out the door to make sure that police haven't discovered them. More and more people are going to what are called contemporary or hipster gatherings for worship, but most people in this country today will be going to churches like this. [Slide shown.] Little country places, where between 10 and 70 people will gather, as they always have, generation after generation.

The biggest growth in the world, where people go to celebrate King Jesus, are places that are called charismatic assemblies. All over the world, people are raising their hands for hours, speaking in tongues and singing praises. But then there are the Presbyterians. Presbyterians worship in a very different way. [Slide shown.] You may even recognize some of the faces. We're back!

What we wanted to do at the start of the autumn is to make clear in our *CPC Life* magazine and here in worship, that we're back, but we do not just come *to* church. We come to *be* the church. Every year I am here, I believe more firmly that the local church is the hope of Planet Earth.

Every year I believe more firmly that the local gathering of sinners, saved by grace and sent out to bless this planet, is the world's great hope. And I also believe that worship, that is, the gathering of the church, is at the center of everything else. It is the only unique thing we do. I mean, the Lions Club has fellowship and Rotary Club has mission projects, but the only unique thing we do is to gather for worship.

You cannot *be* a church without coming *to* church, but you can come to church without being the church. So as we start up again, as you think of coming back to yet another year here in church, or if it's your first season of worship with us, we want to ask you, is it happening to you? Are you needing or do you anticipate needing that invisible God and saying things to God that you would say to no one else, and leaving here a slightly different person? Since the very beginning of this follow Jesus movement, that's the way it's been. Followers of Jesus would be out there in the world, they would talk to others about Jesus, and they would live in ways that were different and people would literally come to Christ and feel like they have a new way to live. They are set free from their old selves. They want to discover what it's like to follow Jesus day in and day out and they say, "How do I learn more?" The person they are talking to says, "Come to church and see" and that's where it all starts to go wrong. When they go to church, they don't find the saints; they find you, they find me. They find broken people, just like them, who gather together and talk about God. The problem is, if it's just talk, that's where the people who want to know Jesus start to get in trouble.

It's been that way from the very beginning. The apostle Paul is part of this movement where the church gets scattered by persecution. He goes to Greece and he starts to talk to people about who Jesus is and how they can know new life and people responded. Paul went to a city called Corinth and they loved what he said. "Yes, yes, tell us more. We want to follow Jesus." They started to follow Jesus and after a couple weeks, Paul left and went someplace else. On the first day of the week, the Corinthians continued to gather and talk about Jesus and the Scriptures and what they could do next. It started out just great, but over time, they got in trouble. So the apostle Paul wrote them a series of letters about how they could get their act together when they gathered and everything ripped apart. These are called the Corinthian Letters. In one of them, Paul talks about the gatherings, the church services. He starts out this way in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, chapter 11.

**17** In the following directives

in this area,

I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

In other words, this is the pastor, it would be better if you skipped church than go and do that.

**18** In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. **19** No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. **20** So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, **21** for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.

In those days, all the churches were house churches; they met in somebody's house. As the movement grew, they met in the larger houses which tended to be where the richer people lived. They would gather for a meal and over time what would happen was, the wealthy Corinthian people started to say, "Let's gather for church at 2 o'clock" but they would say to their friends, "Let's get together at noon." They would have a nice meal at noon and when people came at 2 o'clock, there would literally be just crumbs left for them. Paul said to them,

**22** Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?

The Corinthians felt humiliated. "Certainly I will not praise you for this." In Corinth, worship had become what the people could get out of it. Instead of seeking God together, each person was for themselves. Before you start to think, "Oh, those sick Corinthians," I wonder how much of the "I am not getting anything out of this; I ought to go to a different church" infects us, too. Our "worship wars" sometimes are about music. What is regular worship music? Half of you don't know what that big instrument is over here. At the 9:30 service, we have to hide the drums behind the screen because people worship so differently then. Sometimes, it's about how to dress or how often we have Communion or whether we go to BSF [Bible Study Fellowship] or CBS (Community Bible Study) or on our mission trips. The result is division instead of togetherness and there is tension instead of joy in the church.

St. Paul goes on and after chapter 11, he writes that famous section in his Letters to the Corinthians about love. "Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is gentle." That's 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 and then he goes back to worship in chapter 14.

**23** So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues,

unintelligible to others or themselves

and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

Back then the whole church was charismatic. The Holy Spirit was working in ways so that some people in almost every community were given the ability to speak in foreign languages or maybe languages that are only spoken in heaven, in tongues. They didn't understand until somebody else could interpret it. But here, the church is focused not around interpreting, but on just making music, just making noise. We're Presbyterians. We never let the Holy Spirit through the door, don't worry. Don't you think though, that a lot of our friends, as they are at home right now getting ready for the game, as they are finishing mowing the lawn and pulling out the papers and having that third cup of coffee, that they think about you and go, "Those people are crazy. That's just superstition. They're just going there, wasting their time." Because when they look at the church, they do not see a bunch of people speaking in tongues, but often a service filled with liturgy in ways that nobody else speaks or music that sounds like a funeral dirge or is totally different from what they get anywhere else in their week. Our joke about money in the children's sermon is not a joke for them. They think the church is just a place where they are always asking you for money. Or they think of prayers that drone on and on and on and on, in a place where we talk about God in a bizarre, stilted fashion. "Are those people crazy?" Paul finishes this way. He says,

**24** But if an unbeliever or an inquirer

or seeker

comes in while everyone is prophesying,

speaking out God's truth plainly,

they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, **25** as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

It could be different, but the Corinthian church has had so many problems with the way that they gathered for worship that Paul says, "Better not to go." The worship has turned into war because it's about me and my preferences and not about God and finding and worshiping the living God and loving other people. Worship has become a problem because they are focused on worship just for them. You all know the words to most of the songs. Your friends do not. When they come in and they don't know anything, they feel stupid. Do they feel like it's crazy to be here? It's not for those outside, for people seeking life. But the real reason that worship falls apart for the church in Corinth, including the church of Edina, is because worship is not dealing with real life. They gather together. They are talking about Jesus. They are maybe opening their Bibles, but in their midst, they have blatant sexual infidelity that they are semi-proud of, "Look how good we are." The Corinthians are fighting over who the real leaders are and refusing to go to church when the other person is preaching. They have not learned to love each other. They are actually engaged in lawsuits, so everybody who looks at these followers of Jesus in Corinth is going, "Why would I want to join that? Why would I want to be like them?" And they see the Corinthian church as irrelevant. Does it seem anymore similar now?

The apostle Paul tries to give them some corrections, some ways to get back to their first experience, their first love for Jesus, but he does so by telling them in metaphors so that they would better understand. He uses metaphors like *the body* or *growing seeds*. For me, the best metaphor for the church is that God created the church to be *a locker room*. It's probably because I'm a jock, a recovering athlete, but all of you, whether you have been in studies like this or women's tennis tournaments or volleyball, whatever, you've at least seen them on TV, right? Everybody knows what's supposed to happen in the locker room. The locker room is where you go, half-way through the game, at the break, before you go out and finish the game. Not everybody goes to the locker room, only the people who want to be in the game. Locker rooms are all different but they almost all begin the same way. You shuffle in, whether you are ahead or behind in the game. Everybody is pretty quiet for the first two or three or four minutes because they are resting up. They are panting or their eyes are closed, praying that nobody will see them or they are just leaning back, thinking about what has just happened. There is quiet and they have a chance to sit back and catch their breath.

I sort of think that that is one of the reasons that people should come to church. I went to a leadership conference this past month. One of the best interviews was with Jeffrey Immelt. As many of you know, Immelt is the CEO of General Electric. Hundreds of thousands of employees, hundreds of billions of dollars, and this guy is responsible for it all. He's always there. He works hard and he loves it. He lives for General Electric. The interview about how to be a better leader was fascinating and at the very end, the interviewer said, "Now I know that you're not a regular church-going guy. I mean you're not a member of a church. Your wife is the one who is usually in church on Sundays, right?" And he goes, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." The

interviewer said, "But Jeff, let's just say that you wanted to go to church next week, what would you want to make sure that the people who are leading that church service made happen?" Immelt leans back and says, "Well, I'd want it to be a place where I could be quiet. I have to run everything. I have to make sure everything is right. I'd like to go to one place where I could just relax and be myself, look back at my week and look ahead a little bit but just have a sense that it was a safe place." And I thought, "Genius! That's what we all need!" Sometimes we are running so fast we don't know it, but that's what we need. That's what we pray God will have our locker rooms start with.

When you look at the locker room, you will see some people come in from the game who are pretty dinged up, sprained ankles, twisted knees, scrapes or cuts. One of the things that happens in the locker room, is that people who have been dinged up go over to the trainer for healing. I think the locker room ought to be a place where, in the very tough game of life, those of you who are hurt have a chance to be healed, not by us but by our comfort in the God who heals. I've got to tell you, every week when I come through these doors, I see so many of you who I know have a terrible season of life. They are sitting right near you and just clinging to life. They are clinging to faith because it's tough out there and they are going, "Oh, my God, get me out of this. Oh, my God, I swear if you get me out of this, I'll go to church every week. I'll give 10 percent of my money, like Burt Reynolds in the movie *The End*. "I'll give 10 percent after taxes. God, I swear, I'll give 10 percent before taxes! If You don't get me out of this, I'm just going to swear."

We need to have the church be a place where people can feel free to come in and not have to hide how the week has been. Whether they are feeling like they have faith or not, and together we will ask for faith that comforts and heals. I think the locker room that the apostle Paul is talking about, that he wants those followers of Jesus to come into, has to be a place where encouraging stories are told. Every time in the locker room, sometimes the coach has to work really hard at it, but he will almost always find something that's working, something that's going well. He will say we're going to do this and do that and do it until they stop us. We have found something that works a little bit and he encourages the players with stories, not of work well done, but of work well begun.

That's what we were trying to show in the video, that there are people who are learning how to pray in the midst of a crazy life. We are not people who look like me. I get paid to be good. People who have real lives, just like yours, encourage each other when they tell their stories, when they say, "You know, I'm not the mom I should be, but this Mom's Morning small group has helped me so I don't raise my temper as much." *That* is progress! Or another guy will be saying, "I used to think I would be able to start giving when I got my next raise. That was three raises ago. The only way I'm going to start to be generous is when I start to be generous, right?" When we encourage each other by telling these stories, God brings them to life at just the right time. I loved the whole video, but to me the highlight was Rachel, ninety-four-years-young. Rachel, legally blind Rachel who is there watering her plants and saying, "To the glory forever and ever. Amen." I don't ever want to have to grow up, but if I do, I want to be like that.

Is church a place where you can hear stories of people who stumble and fall and get up and God uses them? I think, for many, what we think of most in the locker room is the coach scrawling diagrams on the chalkboard and saying, "Now when they do this, don't do that, do *this*." He instructs and corrects and shows how to take the mistakes that you made and do better next time. I think that is a primary role of the church, because I am not the follower of

Jesus that I want to be, and I know that you would like to do better in the next half of the game of life. When you come here, it is not to hear Jody Phenow talk to you about how smart you could be, or to hear Rich Phenow give a great talk about this. It is for us together to listen to see if God has something that God wants to say to *you* because you are sitting in a different place than she is. We believe when God's people gather, there is instruction from God about how to do better when you are getting your rear end kicked in the battle of life. For some of you who are newer, it is a lot about teaching, teaching the basics of God's Word. But for most of you, it's not about learning something new, it's about being reminded of something that hasn't happened yet in your life.

At the end of the half-time break, the team almost always gathers together and this reminds me that when we gather together, there has to be a reminder of why we are here, what our purpose is and why we are here together with these other weird people. This needs to be a place of hope and inspiration to get back in the game. No coach ever goes, "Hey, guys, you did so good, it's half-time, we're ahead, take the rest of the day off." No coach or very few coaches ever say, "We're so far behind, we might as well go home." The coach says, "This is what we must do to go back out into the game."

Which of these do you need this season? Do you feel like you need a place to catch your breath? Are you hurt right now in a way that needs to be healed? Do you need to either encourage somebody else with a story that God is using in your life or hear theirs? Do you need to come here to have God speak out of His Word to you about ways that you can live with hope and grace? That's the language of locker room faith, the church as locker room.

The apostle Paul says, "There needs to be a clear focus on the Word of God. If you teach it plainly, people will respond because they see themselves." The apostle Paul says, "When you gather, love one another around the Lord's Table instead of showing who is really spiritual and people will feel loved." The apostle Paul says, "You should go out from worship *changed* to bless other people, so if the unbeliever comes in while people are speaking God's Word, they will be convicted and the secrets of their hearts laid bare and they will fall down next to you and worship saying, 'God is really here.'" That's what I crave for all of us.

We're going to end a little bit differently. The band is going to come up. We're going to sing one more song and then we are going to do something a little bit differently, but for now, let's close this with a prayer that the church learned 500 years ago. It wasn't just Corinth that messed up, it's not just Edina that messes up, but everywhere the church goes, it needs to learn what it's like to *be* the church before it just comes to church. This was called the Heidelberg Confession and it started 551 years ago with a leader and the people responded. I'll lead; you respond. It starts this way.

I believe that the Son of God, through His Spirit and Word,

[All:] I believe that the Son of God, through His Spirit and Word,

gathers, protects, and preserves for Himself a community

[All:] gathers, protects, and preserves for Himself a community

and of this community, I am and always will be a living member.

[All:] and of this community, I am and always will be a living member.

The Corinthians confused coming to church with *being* the church. God reminds us all.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*