

“The Body of Christ” - Ephesians 1.22-23 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

From THE APOSTLES’ CREED: I believe in...

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints...

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, in his book *Creed* about the Apostles’ Creed, focuses on our belief in the church in the fourth sermon in this series. In the phrase the holy catholic church, he begins by defining “holy” and “catholic” as words describing the church here in the creed. Holy refers to belonging to God and catholic means universal. Often when we think of “church” we think of a building. We might note that in Frederick there are many different churches. But these aren’t really churches, they are church buildings. The “church” is the community of believers. And from the creed we learn that it is only one community of believers or followers of Christ. The Apostle Paul described it as the “Body of Christ” (with Christ being the head of the body.) So, we will look at the church entirely, down through time and around the world, as one holy body of Christ meeting at various times and places and doing various holy works for God, but it is all one holy and catholic church. Some of us might know that we are part of a larger church, we are a local congregation of the Frederick District of the Baltimore/Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church. But even as United Methodists, we are only a small part of the whole body of the Church with millions of local branches and over a billion members.

Hamilton notes in his book that the church was Jesus’ idea. He called disciples to follow him but after his resurrection and ascension back into heaven, he left Peter in charge of his church saying, *“I tell you that you are Peter. And I’ll build my church on this rock. The gates of the underworld won’t be able to stand against it.”* (Matthew 16.18) Using some of the writings in the letters of the New Testament he points out how people viewed this new entity that is the early church in which some were coming from Judaism and others were coming from Roman and Greek religions, or as Peter put it, *“Once you weren’t a people, but now you are God’s people.”* (1 Peter 2.10) And Paul wrote: *“So then, let’s work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6.10) We are a household or a family of God. And others in the family of faith were also addressed as brothers and sisters. And he shares that if someone tells him they do not need the church, he points out that, *“it’s not that you need the church but that the church needs you.”*

The church is the continuing presence of Christ in the world. We are the body of Christ. We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world. And when God wants something done in the world, God does not send angels to do it, God sends you and me as the church. On this UMCOR Sunday we give thanks for the opportunity to be the church when and where we are needed. By sharing our gifts and pooling our resources we can do great things as we respond to disasters and hurts and needs anywhere on the planet by working together and sharing our time and our offerings to make a difference today in the name of Jesus.

The “communion of saints” (or community of saints) is another way of describing the church. When we share the sacrament of holy communion it is one body, one loaf broken for the one body – the church. We are a communion or community of faith brought together by the one who calls us each to follow – Jesus Christ. For us, as United Methodists, saints are not just those canonized by the Roman Church who have days set aside for them on the calendar – next

Sunday even non-Catholics will celebrate St. Patrick's Day! For us, the individual members of the church are "the saints." You and I are saints! Did you know that? I believe we can all identify with the idea that we are all sinners. But I would encourage us to see ourselves and one another as saints or at least "saints-in-training." Paul as he wrote letters to the various congregations of the church would write greetings to the saints - the congregation located there. For us the journey of faith is to progress from sinner to saint! John Wesley called it going on to perfection and the process called sanctification – becoming sanctified or "saintified!"

Hamilton says that those who are becoming saints ask questions like "Where does God need me?" and "How can I love and serve others?" It is not so much where can I send my offering as it is where can I spent my time and effort as a part of the universal body of Christ. As saints, you might notice opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus at the work day this Saturday, or helping Habitat with Humanity, or the highway cleanup, etc.

Next Sunday, I invite you to invite all FRANs – Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, and Neighbors to come and become a part of the holy catholic church. We will be baptizing several children from the preschool into the Christian faith. Some of you might be hearing Christ calling you to make a commitment to become a part of the church. And how would you define this church to which you wish to belong? In the creed I am formulating this year I would say that: **I believe in one church made up of all who believe in Christ across time and space.** What do you believe? Write it down and share it with others. It is a part of your creed. Alleluia and Amen.

Announcements for Sunday with Slides.

Today is UMCOR Sunday with a special offering to help the United Methodist Committee on Relief as it responds to disasters and emergencies around the world.

(Slide attached)

This is also the last day to order Easter flowers. Forms are available in the gathering place and upstairs on the table by the elevator.

There is still a box of grid drawings to be done in order to have the drawing to be fully revealed. If you have already done one, please take one or two more home. Remember that they are due back by Palm Sunday, March 24th.

Our Spring Workday is this Saturday starting at 9am. Please see the signup sheet in the gathering place for various jobs to be done to help us look our best for Easter.

Our first FRAN Sunday will be next Sunday, March 17. Everyone is invited to invite a Friend, Relative, Acquaintance, or Neighbor that day. Pray about who are all the FRANs you might invite.

