

What Kind of Church is St Columba's?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, the theme of this evening's sermon is what kind of church is St. C's or St. Columbus. And that's part of it. If you're visiting with us tonight and you haven't been with us over the last couple of Sundays, then it's been in part of a series on membership, which is looked at what it means to be a member, what it means to, or what the church is. And so we're kind of now bringing it to what this local church is because that's really what we're looking at. We're looking both at the church and membership and this local church. And then next Sunday evening, we'll look at what it means to be a member in this local church. So there's a little bit of overlap, but don't let that bring you into a full sense of security that you can fall asleep because it's all good overlap, I hope. And I hope that it's worth repeating as we go through it. It's a huge topic. It's a massive thing to do and I feel very inadequate to do it. I know that there'll be lots of things I'll miss out. You'll be sitting there saying, well, what on earth are you not saying that for? Why haven't you mentioned this? Surely this is important. And if you do think that and say that, then I ask for your forgiveness. But we'll seek to cover a little bit about what it means to belong to St. Columbus or what kind of church we are. I've got one or two slides which I hope will help you and their visual, there's not lots of words, they're visual. So hopefully we get me to get the first slide up and I'll try and move them on myself from then. Okay. So really by way of introduction, we're going to look at very briefly the ethos of the church or the DNA. That's something to do with DNA, that slide there just in case you were wondering. So the kind of, what is the very core of what we are at St. Columbus or what we believe, and we're not claiming anything unique here at all, it's just what we're striving to be biblically of what we strive and want to be under grace. I was very tempted with this kind of gospel DNA or the ethos of the church just to take a phrase which Tim Keller has popularized, I'm not sure if it's his originally,

I don't think it is. He says that the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. Now it would be great just to leave it there and I think that would probably be a good job and we could all go home. But it's not that easy because I'm going to keep you just a little bit longer. But it is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. It's a place for spiritual failures who are cleansed and getting better. It's a place for disciples who are on the move, who are seeking to love God and love their neighbour with the help of the Holy Spirit. What is our DNA? What is it? It's all of these things and it's more. But if I was to kind of say what was really important, I would say Christ is absolutely important, well I'll unfold it a little bit. Christ is absolutely crucial to what we are.

Christ, I would say that again, Christ is absolutely crucial to what we are, what we believe, who we are. And then the other thing I would say is really important is people.

There was a wedding last night and sitting beside a very successful multimillionaire businessman and he buys companies quite often and he buys companies that he has done what's called due diligence on. I've heard a lot about that in footballing terms in Scotland the last few weeks. And when he interviews someone who is the head honcho of that company, the first question he asks them is, what's important to you in business? And the answer he's looking for is people. That's what he wants is the answer. That is helpful to him to understand the ethos and the thinking of the businesses that he might take over. And there's a lot of crossover there with the church. The church is all about Christ, it is to glorify Christ, it is to worship Christ and honour Christ. But people are also very important and that's why I read Romans 16 because it's a great, if you just cut it down the middle, it's a great kind of dissected picture of what a church is and what is it?

It's full of people, it's full of names. Paul took the time to get to know these people. They were important to him, people mattered. People were important and their gifts and their hard work and whether they were men or women or children or families, people were important and that is hugely significant. And so when we think about membership, we want to think about what it means to belong, what it means to belong to St. Columbus for example in this situation and therefore we're going to look a little bit at our DNA. What is our DNA? What are the important things to the leadership? What are the important things to us? What are the important themes that we repeat again and again as a church? None of this I don't think will be new to you. But I think it's worth bearing, it's worth repeating and reminding ourselves of what we're not and what we are. The first place I would say that we are a worshipping church. We're a worshipping church. Several times in Romans 16 Paul speaks about various people and the church that meets in their house. They didn't have a big expensive building that was a grade two listed building. They didn't have anything like that. They met in people's houses. But that was the church and they met together and worshiped. That was what marked the New Testament church. We saw that already. I'm not going to go into that again. We saw that when we looked at what the church was. But we need to recognize and remind ourselves that above all else we're not just here together to have a good time to socialize with one another. Can't wait till the worship bit's over so I can speak to my friends. However significant and important that might be and how it is because it's about people. But we are a God centered people. We're a worshipping people. And so in this church you will find that God is central to all that we do. He's central to, His word is central to our worship. I preach from the middle of the church because it's symbolic of the word of God and the preaching of God being central. That's why that pulpit horrific in its monstrosity and in its beauty is like that because it's pointing to the importance in the middle of the church of the word of God and elevating that word because the word is central to all we do. The prayer is central to what we do because we're communicating with God. We do it together. It's important that we do it together not just on our own. The sacraments that we pass the cup from one another because we are reminding ourselves that both we take

[7:31] Christ personally but we share Him with one another. The pastoral care is based on God's word and it's based on the Bible and it's based on teaching that Bible to one another.

We come together to learn of Christ and in our public worship to worship Him and it's to remind us of that heaven. Remember we saw that before with the church? The heavenly perspective.

There should be some kind of parallel however tenuous, however fragile between what we're doing and what we'll experience in heaven because we're together worshipping God and that's what we're doing in glory. So we're God-centered as a worshipping church and because of that we're striving probably not very successfully but striving to keep all of what we do simple.

And when we come together we want us to have that simplicity of worship together. We want to pursue excellence. We want to pursue a distinctiveness that's based on our characters and based on our theology and based on our spiritual culture and heritage that we come from. We want to praise God in that way. We want to worship Him in a way that is prayerfully planned, that is prayerfully executed in which we all engage by preparation, by listening spiritually, by looking to hear what God is saying to us. We want it to be uplifting and we want this day, this Lord's day to be a day we can as much as possible set apart for being together in worship, for being together and in talking about Jesus in company with one another. He's given us this day and it's a great day. This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. So we want to protect this day together. We want to worship together. We want to worship in the morning together and in the evening if we can together. It's not really in the course of a whole week, two hours isn't very much is it to be together. People say a lot today will come into the church say well it's an interesting tradition you've got, you worship twice on a Sunday, what do you do at night?

What's different about night? Because a lot of churches will just have an hour of worship in the morning. What's different about night? What do you do? Well I say well not, things aren't very different at night. I hope the sermon is different. I hope it's focused and prepared and well and that worship is different. But it's good isn't it? It's not that different at night from the morning. I know I could stand in my head but I don't think it would be good really just for the sake of being different. But let's use the day and let's meet morning and if we can make every effort to hem in the day with worship together for that short time that we have. So with a worshiping church that is very central to our DNA. We're also I hope and continue to be a learning church. In verse 17 of the chapter we read in Romans 16 Paul urges the brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in the way which are contrary to the teaching you have learned. So this whole church was a learning church. There was tradition that is biblical tradition. There was truth.

[11:12] There was to be passed down and people to learn that because it was Jesus they were learning about. It was Jesus in his word they were learning about and that is what we're to we are all disciples and we will all spend our life learning from one another and from the word and from the Holy Spirit. Learning to love one another and learning to love God. That's what we do. That's what we're about. Learning to love God and love one another and within that there will be spiritual oversight so that there is vigilance. There is vigilance and we are listening for God and for his word vigilantly. You know Paul warns of false teaching. That's one of the reasons we have spiritual leaders who are trained in the word and who are under God have spiritual oversight and who themselves are under Christ because we have to warn and we have to be aware of false teaching and we are accountable ourselves and there's to be a humble learning under God's word and it's to be in the church a lifelong culture. Isn't that a popular phrase today in education? Lifelong learning I think it is. Well it's important. It's important in the church lifelong learning. There should be nobody here tonight especially in the pulpit who will ever say I think I've learned it.

I think I know. We're all learning. We're all disciples. That means we're all humble and we're all following Jesus Christ and amazed by him and learning from him. That's incredible what he has said and what he has taught and what he has shown me in my life.

We are a culture of learning. We have a culture because we are privileged to have a lot of young people and we want to teach them and found them well in the truth. We want to deliver leaders in the church and all that we do in the church and in the city groups is to teach about Jesus Christ so we want to talk about Jesus and we want to example Jesus so that we're learning from one another. Every time we come to church, every time we're in company with our fellow Christians in St. Gloombas, whatever it will be, we're teaching our fellow person something. We've been an example, good or bad and therefore we have this great responsibility to recognise that we are learning and we're focused I hope in our learning also. We want to educate and teach spiritually and bring people closer to Jesus Christ. We want to spend time with new Christians telling them the basics of the faith. We want to encourage people to live their lives in a Christ-centered way so we have a porterbrook course. We do mentoring. I try and plan the preaching so it's balanced. Old Testament, New Testament, themes, people, gospels, epistles. There's a variety of learning from God's word and believe it or not, I might not seem like that but I try to plan the preaching at least six months ahead so there's that balance in what we do. Prayerful, honest, hardworking, learning together and that is what we're a worshipping church and these are all kind of intermixed but we're also I hope a learning church. If we have stopped learning, if we find that there's utterly nothing in this sermon and the preaching or the Bible study groups for me then there's something wrong. It may be with the preaching, it may be with the Bible study groups but not entirely. If you're not hungry, if you're not thirsty, if you're not listening and looking for God, this is a school where we're meeting with and learning about Jesus. So we're a worshipping church, our DNA, we're a learning church.

We're also a going church. We're a going church. At the end of that section in Romans 16 and he speaks about the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ by the command of the eternal God that all nations might believe in obey him. There's this command to go to proclaim the gospel and I tried really hard not to use the word missional church. Not because I don't like, I quite like the term, I do actually really like the term missional but it's become a bit of a buzzword and I think when some people hear it they just, oh yeah I know I've heard that before and it's trendy to talk about it just now. But a going church is a church because that's part of the Great Commission, isn't it? Go, go into all the world. So we're a church that is going. We're active, we're long, we're looking to be active, purposeful, intentional with a vision, with a strategy. We're not just rumbling, I hope, rumbling on from week to week. Just oh, there's another Sunday, here we go. We have a purpose.

We take time to think about where we're going. If we're going to plant a church, are we now going to plant another church? What's it going to look like? How is Brownsfield coming along? Will we start in Portobello? What will we do? How will we grow the gospel? How will we spread the gospel? How will we be involved in that? How can we share the gospel as individuals?

[17:06] Don't leave it all up to the minister. How can I be sharing? What can I be involved in? We have a commission to share the gospel and a passion for being involved in the culture, so that they will hear about Jesus from us. We saw that when we were talking about the church. We don't say, this is your church, speaking to someone else. What are you doing about evangelism? You say, this is Christ's church, and I'm part of that. What am I doing about sharing that gospel? Because we're reaching out. We're reaching out, seeking to make disciples.

I think one of the greatest burdens we have as leaders, and certainly the greatest burden I have as a leader, is how few conversions to Christ there are from St. Columbus. Now, we might know that, you know, until the day, the last great day, we might not know how influential the putting out of the gospel has been the sowing of the seed, but tangibly, people coming from darkness into light, from unbelief into faith. We are longing to see more of that, and we're looking at what we need to be, and how we need to be closer to Christ and dependent on Christ in order for that time. We are reaching out, seeking to make disciples, seeking to be involved in mercy ministry, in different ways, going out with the love of Christ, with no agenda whatsoever, but simply to love people in this city.

Maybe through Bethany, or passing the baton, or the caravan, or having the folk in here during the winter. But we're reaching out as a going church, but we're also, and this is equally important, we're also reaching in. We're kind of going out, but I hope we're also going in, because, and you know we've stressed this, probably ad infinitum here, or ad nauseam here, is the importance of community. Absolutely vital to us, isn't it? That we see that. We seek to be showing and reflecting the gospel by being committed to one another, committed and loving and sacrificial and vulnerable and costly in love towards one another, not just meeting here on the large day, however good and significant and blessed and social and spiritual that might be, but seeking to live as a community, however, and that's not easy for us. It's not easy because we're disparate throughout the city, but we're seeking to be that kind of people. And I would crave for you to recognise that more and more, to be hospitable, opening your home when you can, and inviting people to be part of your family and seeing the significance of that. I would love all of us increasingly to have what I call pastoral eyes. So we look around us on a Sunday and we see somebody that might be new sitting on their own, possibly uncomfortable because no one is speaking to them, that we never give people our back as we speak to one another in an inward looking group. They were never just so obsessed with ourselves or with our partner or with our wife or our husband or our family. We have no time for the person who may need time, who may need a company who is longing for belonging in the kingdom of God so that the church for us isn't a take it or leave it, but that we would die for the people in the church, die for them with that kind of love. So it's a learning church, it's a reaching, a going church that's reaching out and reaching in. Now I'm cheating here because I forgot it last week, but that whole community, that whole reaching in has a great spiritual element, doesn't it, that we are not just a community of social, socialites, but we're a spiritual community that love one another and spoke last week about the one another's that are so significant. I brought the picture this week. I'll leave it somewhere here in the church. That is the 23 one another's of the New Testament and I think it's probably we should leave it in the church. I did a series on these one another shortly before leaving Ruskin and we will remember the one another sermons on the back and that is what we hope is the framework or the structure or the scaffold that governs our community. Be devoted to one another, honour one another above yourselves, live in harmony, stop passing judgment, accept, instruct, serve, do not bite and devour, do not provoke, do not envy, carry one another's burdens, be kind and compassionate, forgive, submit, encourage, spur one another on, hospitality, don't slander, don't grumble, confess your sins, pray for one another, fellowship with, wash one another's feet, encourage one another, greet one another, the last one with a holy kiss or the Scottish equivalent. So remember these one another's, remember that they are the structure and the

scaffold behind what we do. So we're a worshipping church, a learning church and a going church. We're also a church among churches and we need to remember that as what we are. We're not just an independent church, we're a church in the world. I don't know if anyone saw this week Andy Hawthorne from the message, he's a message trustee with who was speaking at the Scottish Parliament and he was giving that two minutes for thought for the day they have and it was unashamedly, clearly, powerfully Christian and he was saying, I can't remember what day it was, say the 12th of June 2013, said this is the greatest day in the history of the Christian church today because there are more people who will come to faith today in Jesus Christ than has ever come to faith in the history of the church since Christ came. And he was basically saying, God is on the move, there are people, more people becoming Christians today than ever have become Christians. And he says it might not look at that case in Scotland today but he said basically, he was basically saying God's on the move and the church is growing and we praise God for that. We need to remember that we're part of that church, it might be a struggle for us here but the church is growing and God is on the move. But we're also part of the free church of Scotland so we're not an independent church, we don't just exist on our own, we're part of the denomination that is the free church of Scotland and that is both Presbyterian and Reformed. That means that we are Presbyterian governed by elders, governed by elders who are deacons to support and help them, encouraging body ministry within the church. We are accountable to one another, to God, we are protected much though you would like to possibly, you can't just throw me out unless you have good, solid reason and you can't just throw me out even if you have good, solid reason but you need to get the backing of the Presbyterian and then the assembly because we have these protections in place and you know it's important protections because they're important protections for the people too that we're not just self-accountable, that we have wider accountability to a wider spiritual leadership as it was in the New Testament when certain disputes and certain issues went back to the elders in Jerusalem, checks and balances. Presbyterian government also reformed in our theology, that means that we take our theology from the Bible and it's the theology that was rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation, that's what we're called Reformed, where we believe that the Bible is entirely true, that we are desperate sinners, that God is really big, that the cross is absolutely central, that grace is totally incredible, that disciples are always secure, that life is holy, holy. Some of the

Reformed theology we believe and also we're part of the church, among churches within the city, not just the other free churches but we're in a gospel partnership with churches from all different denominations. So it gives us, you know, that is what we are, we're a church among churches, we're nearly there. These are maybe some of the big things that we are but just very briefly and I'm going to speak more about this next week. If we are, if that's our gospel DNA as a church, how do we try and structure it? Will we try and structure it in a couple of ways? One is, well you've heard me saying a lot talking about big church, little church, so that's just a picture of St. Columbus and also Stockbridge, one of the city groups, so it's big and small. So that's how we've tried to work as a church.

[26 : 41] We've tried to be a, it's all relative, I know it's not big compared with other churches but bigger than the smaller bit. So we're a city centre church and that's important to us. It's important that we're a gospel preaching church in the city centre of Edinburgh.

A lot of people come in and say, oh this is great, this is a church still. It's not a pub and it's not a club and it's not a nightclub. It's a church in the middle of the city. All the other churches around here, a lot of them are no longer churches. So we have the gospel being preached from the city centre here and that's important to us. Because we're a city centre church, we're kind of transient, changing a lot, but we hope we have a growing core of people and we have this presence for worship in the city centre. We also want to do things together as a church, maybe evangelistic events now and again. We're encouraging one another by doing things together as a bigger church, meeting a more diversity of people in the bigger church, welcoming students, welcoming international people, welcoming tourists. It's a big church. But then we recognise that small church, the city groups particularly as a reflection of that, is hugely important for accountability spiritually, for spiritual intimacy, for commitment, for service, for growing, for relationships so that we, especially for new people, it's great to be able to plug them into a group that's easier for them to get to know than just the big church. Now I know that's tough. I know being small church is much harder. It's much easier being part of big church because you can just kind of fade into the background and come and go as you please. It's easy.

Small church is much more accountable and much more sacrificial. And it's much more, I publicly recognise this evening in front of you all, it's much harder for the elders.

And it's a great cost and a great commitment for them and the deacons and the teams because they're not full time in ministry, I am. And they have to balance their work week with all the commitment of small church and that is a great burden. And so what I'm pleading with is that you will all take part in small church and be involved in taking decisions in bearing the burden for them, in pastoring one another and saying, look here am I? How can I serve Christ in this area, in this group? Not sitting back, not being consumerist, not being passive, but actively looking to be part of this small body of working functioning people, not complaining and moaning when things don't go right, which they always will not go right. They'll always be these times when we struggle because we're a hospital and we're sinners saved by grace. Please remember that. But remember what we are striving to do, big church, small church, each with different kind of emphasis and different kind of, don't sit on the edges, especially don't sit on the edges complaining, but be involved, be wholehearted, pour yourself out into serving Jesus Christ in this way, in the church. So it's through big church, small church and it's also through membership. Membership is part of the way in which we encourage people to follow the commitment that we have to Jesus

Christ into the gospel. These are secular days, consumerist days and the temptation is for us to lower the bar and say, well it doesn't matter, nothing of these things matter, just come along. But what we're hoping to do over this next year and part of the strategy, discussions we've been having is this burden and concern we have for raising the bar, both for the elders and the minister and the whole congregation, raising the bar of commitment, raising the bar of accountability, raising the bar of being involved, of being submissive to Christ into his teaching, raising the bar of loving God and loving our neighbour, raising the bar of our financial giving, raising the bar because he's worth it and because he will do great things and membership is part of our recognition of that. I'll just say more about it and Andy said a great deal about this morning in terms of where it fits in and we seek to do that. And so that's a little bit, I'm sure I've missed out hugely significant things, really difficult thing to summarise but that is kind of what our DNA is, that we are a worshipping church, a learning church, a going church and we're a church among churches and we strive to work that out through commitment of membership and through big church, little church. There's tea and coffee after service this evening, everyone's welcome to stay, so it's just a time of fellowship. The elders will be there, I'll be there. If you do have questions about membership, if you do or if you're considering becoming a member, then it might be a good time to informally talk about it down there and so I encourage you to do that this evening. But I do thank you for taking the time to come and to listen and to staying awake which is great. And may God bless what we do, I know I haven't worked moulded or used scripture a great deal tonight other than in principal form but that picture in Romans 16 I think would very much also fit in with the kind of DNA that we're striving to have as a congregation. So let's bow our heads briefly in prayer before finishing with the gospel song. Lord God we ask and pray that you would teach us how to be your body as a people, that we would be willing to learn, that we would be humble, that we would recognise that we have much to learn from scripture. We have a great need for dependence on the

[33 : 34] Holy Spirit. We make many mistakes and again we confess our sins to you corporately and individually. Lord guard us against the spirit of this age, guard us against the cynicism of this age and the lack of loyalty, the consumerism, the ease with which we can imbibe thinking that is not Christ centred or Bible based. Help us to submit to scripture and to submit to the word of God and to the teaching of God in our lives and bless us all, bless us as individuals, bless us as families, bless us as old and young people. May we look out for one another, we do pray that there would not be divisions, pray that it wouldn't be simply magnetically attracted to our own friends or our own social group, that we would love people in this church, that we would not leave people on the outside, that we would not get to know people, that we would not think people are too young or too old or too different from us but they would be under Christ committed. Help us Lord to understand and imbibe this gospel DNA that we seek to have and bless us as we worship together and close our worship with singing praise to you for Jesus' sake. Amen.