

Being a Member at St Columba's

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[0 : 00] This is the end of a short series we've done over the last three or four weeks on the theme of membership of the church. We began looking at what is church and then we looked at what it meant to become a member of the church and then we looked at what is St. Columbus as a church and this evening the theme is what is it to be a member in St. Columbus.

I hope if you're visiting with us tonight that you'll not find that irrelevant and boring. I hope not and that is partly because of the way that I'm hoping to deal with that which I hope is relevant for all of us as we think about such issues. I've got one or two slides this evening as well with various texts. I'm going to dip into the passages we read but it's more thematic than going through a specific passage again. Can I have the first slide up and then I'll maybe be able to move them myself after that. Okay what I don't want to do in this sermon is with regard to being a member of St. Columbus. I don't want to give you a list of requirements. This is what you have to do. This is what you should be if you're a member of this congregation. I don't want to give you a list of expectations. I don't want to heap a whole lot of guilt on people and on you saying this is how you should act and this is what you should be like if you're a member. I'm not here to market St. Columbus as a congregation or try and win people over to the work that we're doing here. I certainly don't have all the answers for you with regard to membership and I don't want to give you the impression that in becoming a member or being a member of the congregation here you will be doing the church a favour. So I don't want to do any of these things. I do want to do is remind you of a couple of things by way of introduction. I do want to remind you, as we said last week, that the church in St. Columbus is no different is a hospital for sinners.

That's what it is. Sinners saved by grace. It's a place of grace. That's what I want to remind you of the congregation. I want to remind you that it's a place of miracles and mayhem. A place where there will be at times ugliness, the ugliness of sin rearing its head. But there will also be beauty, the beauty of Jesus Christ. It's a place where I know that you will experience joy and fellowship and friendship with others. I also know as we were reminded of this morning, at a period you will find sadness. We will weep together and we will laugh together. I do want to remind you that it will be a place where I hope and pray that you'll experience the warmth of heaven.

Also sometimes you may sense a cold blast of hell. I remind you of these things. I also want to point you very specifically this evening. This might not be at all what you've expected in a sermon on membership, but I want to point you to the Lamb of God. John said to Jesus who was coming towards him in that first passage that Andy read, Luke, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's what I want you to recognize and see is the significance of what membership in the congregation is driving us towards. It's the motive and the reason for involvement in the life and work of the church is that we see Jesus, that we see Jesus together, that we learn from Jesus Christ. This is to be a place where grace reigns in the congregation, in the community, in the body because we are striving for grace to reign in our hearts, in our own individual lives. A place where we recognize we are getting what we don't deserve.

That's what motivates us and what enables us to be committed and involved and willing to get our hands dirty for Jesus Christ in the congregation. That we are giving in the work of and life of the congregation out of unpayable gratitude to this Jesus Christ, who we see the Lamb of God, who we will celebrate together at the Lord's Supper.

[5 : 18] There will be a place, I do want you to see, it will be a place where we will be impossibly loving God and loving one another. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Why do I want us to focus on that? Well, I want us to focus on that because He is worthy. That's why. That is why we want Him to be the motivation behind our involvement and commitment to the congregation. He is worth it. Then I looked, Revelation 5, and I heard the voice of many angels and

a loud voice they were saying, worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and glory and honour and glory and praise. So we have this great recognition that in heaven there's an understanding of the worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ that to accept all our praise and glory. And that is what I want us to recognize and know is at the very core of our commitment and involvement in the life and work of the congregation that He is worth our very best. That in our involvement in the church He's worth our very best, our wholehearted obedience. And as we bask in the knowledge of who He is and as we think about Him and consider Him and pray to Him and learn from Him and open His word and consider Him and meditate on Him that we will commit to Him. And as we commit to Him we will commit to the church and to one another as God's people. That we will commit to His teaching, that we will commit to His worship, that we will commit to His people, that we will commit to His work in our lives, that we will find that He is one who is worthy of our lives, of our resources, of our time, of our money, of all that we are and all that we have as we see and as we worship Him together.

He's a great God and He's a great Savior and He is worthy. I just want to read a couple of extracts this evening. One is from Susie. She gave me permission to read this. I asked Susie this week for her testimony just to write it down for us. And I want to share a little bit of that with you because it just reminds us of why He is worthy. And then I want to read a very short email from Nicky Lodd, who, those of you who've been in the congregation for a while will know Nicky is on the sea. She's a sailor and she doesn't get Christian fellowship and she doesn't have Christian company. I just want to read a couple of extracts. First, from Susie, talking about where she came to know Jesus through friends and that she wanted to give her life to the Lord and asked him to show her the way. And she says, when I woke up the next morning, the next day, everything still looked the same. The world hadn't changed and I hadn't changed. So I kept asking my roommate questions about God and Christianity and studied the Bible with her. I realized more and more how sinful I was. I was selfish. I was proud. I couldn't love others as I should and I absolutely did not deserve to go to heaven. And after about a year, half a year, I finally realized that this was the whole point of the gospel. I would never be able to earn my way to heaven. But God loved me so much that he gave me a way to get close to him. He sent his son into this world to suffer incompatible pain, to take all my shortcomings and my sins and to nail them on the cross with him.

And because he died for me, I could not only have a relationship with him here on earth, but I could also be sure that I would spend eternity with him. Because he's worth it.

He's worth it. And that is the testimony of those who come to know Jesus and who are involved in the membership through that testimony and through that involvement. But I want to also read just a little bit from Nicky's email. I haven't had time to ask her permission for this, but I know she would like it. She's a great girl. Hello. I was listening to your sermon on membership of the church and felt inspired to write this email. I felt your sermon touch me. I recently found out on this, out that this base holds no fellowship meetings. And after your sermon, I vowed to change that. I want you to know that as you raise the bar at St. C's, I want to make a commitment to do the same.

No matter where I am. Now that's great, isn't it? She values the family here. Because she's never with us hardly. When she can, she's here. But I am going to stand with you, she says, shoulder to shoulder. Well, maybe not shoulder to shoulder, because she's very small. But she will stand with us. And she makes that commitment because she knows he is worthy. And that's wonderful. And we share that this evening. So what then should membership look like in the congregation? Well, people say the Bible doesn't speak about membership. And that's right at some levels, deliberately, or specifically. But it does talk about us being members together of one body and sharers together in the promise of Jesus Christ. And we recognize that the step we take to encourage people into formal membership is simply a public recognition of that, of that commitment together to Jesus Christ, to recognize his teaching, and his structures for the church, for the local church, for the accountability that we give to one another, and for the encouragement that making that commitment means to one another. And I think it would be nice, and we're looking as a session, looking as elders, to develop membership vows where we are expressing our testimony to Jesus Christ, for the congregation and also vow to come under the pastoral care of the congregation under the [12:12] New Testament structures of that care with the elders and leaders, and also to care for and pastor one another. But very briefly, can I just give you five things, very briefly, five things that it looks like in broad terms, okay, very briefly. And maybe this isn't what, again, you're thinking about. It involves submission, because that's what he did. And being found in the presence of a man,

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. So we are submissive as Christians to this one Lord, and we submit to him, and we submit to one another, and we submit to his structures and patterns for being a people together. I think it's important for us in the church, and it's very difficult, I know, it's important for us to leave our high horses at the door and allow Christ simply to be head of our lives and head of our hearts. So it'll always involve submission to his lordship and submission to one another. It also involves sacrifice, going back to that text, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It involves sacrifice because he did. He sacrificed for us, and he is worth it. And so we love him, and we love one another, and that involves sacrifice. It involves sacrificing our pride and our independence, relying on his spirit and relying on what he has done for us, and denying sin. What will it look like in a congregation? What are some of the things it'll look like? It'll look like compromise. It'll look like consensus. It'll look like commitment to one another and to the cause of Christ, and that requires great sacrifice. No one's denying that.

It requires great effort. Not so much what can the church and St. Columba's do for me, but how can I reflect this worthy Jesus Christ in what I do for all those around me here in this church?

Membership really for us is just a visible demonstration of being committed to doing that, to being forgiven, to forgive, to being wronged, and to give of who we are and what we are for him, because he's worthy. Submission and sacrifice and service.

Philippians 2.7, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being found in human likeness. We do that because he did. It might not be popular. It might not be easy, but as people together we are looking for members who are committed to serving the world in mercy ministry, people who don't know Jesus, serving the world by sharing the gospel with those who don't know Jesus Christ and serving in the church, enabling this community to function with all the kind of things that even in a one hour of worship on a Sunday morning or on a Sunday evening is involved in enabling us to worship together using your gifts and time and talents and efforts in whatever way that is necessary. And also suffering. Really cheery, yeah? It's a cheery sermon. It's great.

I'm coming at a good cheery bit in a minute. There is suffering. There's submission. There's sacrifice, there's service, and there's suffering. He was oppressed. Isaiah 53, very famous words. Yeah, he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. There's a sheep before a shear is silent, yet he did not open his mouth. He did. So as he mentioned that in our testimony, she came to recognize and know that. And so do we recognize that in being together for Christ we will suffer.

[16 : 57] We will suffer because as a people who know and love Jesus Christ, we have a common enemy, the evil one who seeks to undermine our faith, to draw us away from Jesus, to give idols that we spend time and effort and energy with instead of him. And we will suffer for the sake of the gospel.

And we need to support one another through that suffering. We need to help and pray for and encourage one another in trials and temptations. We need to hold the hand of people through the pains of healing because healing from the inside out has lots of pain. And we take time to be with people who are growing and transforming and being sanctified by Jesus Christ. And also we beware when we think of suffering in the church, we beware that we don't become the cause of suffering in the lives of our fellow Christians in the church. Because isn't that so often the way that is often how the devil will work in community. He will work to disengage and separate and cause friction and hurt and pain. And we will judge others and we will be separated from others and we will suffer as a result. And so we recognize and see not only the suffering we experience but also the suffering we experience because of Jesus Christ but the suffering that sometimes we can cause by our sinful and careless Christian lives. So there is suffering and there is sacrifice and there is submission and there is service but there is rejoicing. And as a people we rejoice and we rejoice together and we recognize that as we come together. And these are some of the characteristics of being committed and being a member in the congregation. I know it's not probably what you wanted to hear or expected to hear but I want to push you towards Jesus Christ and I want him to be the motive behind our involvement and our commitment. And we recognize like Peter says in 1 Peter 1 8 though you have not seen him you love him and even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you receiving the end result of your faith at salvation of your souls. So that's an important part of what we are together and the

commitment that we share together that we have this amazing paradox that is inexplicable outside of grace and outside of truth that is that we submit and that we sacrifice and we serve and we suffer but we also experience inexpressible and glorious joy when we are fully committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and when He is our Lord and when He's our Savior. Not when we're giving Him half of our lives or half-hearted commitment and service but when He is our Lord and our Savior in all His fullness. Hebrews 12 speaks about the suffering that Jesus underwent because of the joy that was set before him and we have that same joy set before us too and I read about that in Revelation a good book to read the end of Revelation a great book to read that was written particularly to a suffering church a persecuted church persecuted church that didn't experience all the joy and fullness that sometimes we expect to experience as Christians and yet God was laying before them look I've got to prepare a place I am joyfully waiting for you to come and there's this great future and this great rejoicing that we can know and so we have an inexpressible and glorious joy and service. He wants us to live life to the full as we look forward in serving Him. He wants us to make that sacrifice and commitment and the recognition of struggle with a smile. He wants us to be cheerful in His service. He wants us to encourage one another and build one another one another up. I'm convinced He is looking for us to share uplifting and powerful worship as a glimpse of being together and of being in heaven with Him and indeed the Lord Supper is that fragment that points us forward to a great feast where He will be with us and it will be a marriage feast it will be a it will be a celebration it will be a full time of joy and pleasure and rejoicing and eternal life in His presence so we have this future and we have this freedom and we have this individuality and yet we have this identity and this oneness as we serve Him together and may it be that as members of the Lord, really if all I say this evening is that I want you to recognize the Lamb of God and to recognize that He is worthy and to remember as we read in Revelation chapter 22 that there is this river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. So speaking about membership, seeing the Lamb of God and seeing worthy as the Lamb and also looking forward to the Lamb who is at the centre of the throne of God and that being our commitment and being our understanding of involvement and membership of the church and all that the New Testament says about being in that place of local service to the local church and the structures that He gives to enable that to flourish and develop.