



Colossians 1:15-22

YAWN

Going to church. It's not exactly a popular pastime these days is it? We're quite a mixture this morning. Some of us are regulars here, some come occasionally, whereas there may be some who rarely come to church and are here because of Ned's Dedication. Whether it's your first time at church or whether you're an old hand, we welcome each of you equally and pray God's blessing on you.

If you don't come here regularly, was church what you expected this morning? For many people church is seen as boring and old fashioned – like this. MR BEAN GOES TO CHURCH

CHURCH – BORING That of course is a take off of traditional church – serious Richard Briers characters, elderly ladies in hats, pews, people like me droning on and those who can't keep awake. I'll be looking for anyone holding their eyelids up!

That's not all. Here's a VOX POP of what people think of church. Familiar isn't it? But church needn't be like that. I see churches rather like sport. I think the world's most boring sport is bowls INDOOR BOWLS. It's less exciting than watching paint dry – here are the ENTHUSIASTIC SPECTATORS. Some of you laughed, others are horrified I would be rude about bowls. What sport do you like Mark? STOCK CAR RACING. It's exciting, action packed and the rest of it. OK you have to take your own chair to Foxhall, the catering's awful and there is always a long queue for the toilets. One man's sport is another's boredom. When it comes to church being boring, it's people who are boring, not God! He still does all the amazing things that He has done down the centuries; changing lives, bringing hope.

Church is not about style but about substance. Last week we looked at what church is. We found that when the Bible refers to church, it's never about a building or about an organisation. The Bible uses a Greek word *ekklesia* for church, and what it means is a group of people summoned for a particular purpose. Anyone who has come into a personal relationship with God through Jesus is called and is part of His *ekklesia*, His church. Maidstone Road Baptist Church isn't a building, it isn't a charitable religious organisation – it's a group of people God has called to worship and serve in this community.

Right at the core of what we believe is that the CHURCH IS ABOUT JESUS. Here's what we read earlier: *Christ is the head of his body, the church; he is the source of the body's life.* The bottom line is that the church was founded by Jesus and exists to serve His purposes. Why should we be so enthusiastic about Jesus? Because it's through Jesus we can make sense of life and have a hope that goes beyond life into eternity. How come?

I spoke a moment ago about knowing God personally. That's how God wants you to know Him. Perhaps that seems strange to you. Maybe you don't kind of know Him that way. All human beings have done things, wrong things (the Bible calls them sin), that keep us from God. One of the most basic of them is people ignore God most of the time and then wonder why they don't know Him personally. Try doing that to your best friend – they won't be your best friend for long!

God knew that naturally we just couldn't make His standard, but He still loves us and wants each of us to know Him. To sort that problem, He Himself became a human being – Jesus. This is how Paul put it: SLIDE *Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.*

Jesus died on the cross so that God could forgive us our sins and we could be free to know Him and know all the hope that brings – and we make sense of life. God changes lives.

But He doesn't force Himself on us. Jesus has died for us. If we want to make sense of life, get right with God and find all the hope and understand all the amazing things He brings to life, then we need to decide for ourselves to accept the offer of forgiveness and life. Of course, otherwise we can just continue to ignore Him.

But for those of us who know Him, then this part of the passage applies:

At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought. But now, by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his presence.

And God has given us one another – church. He has called us to be part of His church. And what's church for – this gives it to us.

SLIDE

Church is where we can meet God together God has made us His friends. Did you have a best friend when you were a child? Most people had best friends. What do you do most with a best friend – you want to spend time with them because you enjoy their company. We are His friends – he wants to spend time with us, not just as individuals, but with the other people who have become His friends – and He's called us together to do that as a church.

SLIDE

Church is where God can change us God wants us to bring us holy, pure and faultless into His presence. How does that happen? When we allow God to change us. And where is that most likely to happen – where God has called us to.

SHOULD BE EXCITING

Church is an important place to be – because we should expect to encounter God when we come to worship – and we must expect God to change us. Now that should make church very exciting.

Does that happen? Sometimes. But who's fault is it if we don't experience the presence and power of God? Here's a clue – not God. He's ready to bless our lives and change us where that needs to happen – how prepared are we?

Is there something in our life that needs changing this morning – examples? - God can do that. Maybe the change we most need is to just know Him – Jesus. Is that you?

SLIDE

Who is church for? Everyone!

TITLE

Prayer