

Sermon for Sunday, October 10, 1982 by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, Senior Pastor
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"GOD AND HIS LEFTOVERS"

Romans 11:1-6

Text: "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace".
Romans 11:5

Do you know where the church began? You must go back into the dim antiquities of time. You must go back into the ancient days when the hub of the world was centered in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. There, in those ancient places where civilization has its cradle, God reached down among men and selected one. And God called out this one man whose name was Abram. Accidentally, the Greek words for "called out" are el kalleo from which we get one of our English words for the church, the word ecclesiastical.

To this one man God said, "No longer shall you be called Abram, but Abraham, for I shall make you a father of many nations." And that is what the name Abraham means, "Father of many nations." To this newly named Abraham God gave a covenant of grace--for God made a promise, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people."

Well, that's how the church began--God calling out one person and entering into covenant with him. The old Testament is basically the story of what happened to the church--of what happened to Abraham and his descendants. Sometimes God's people were strong and faithful--sometimes they were weak and unfaithful. Sometimes God's called out people--the ek kalleo--the church--were what God meant for them to be, but more often they were sinful and rebellious. There were times when some thought the church had perished and like Elijah in the wilderness cried out, "Lord, they have killed the prophets, digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life."

But, do you know, God told Elijah there was a faithful remnant left, he said he always had some leftovers. And down through history that has always been the case. So often the church has been unfaithful and there have been those who thought they were the only ones left. But God has always had for himself a remnant--some leftovers.

A lot of us in this congregation have a misunderstanding of what the church is. It's my fault. I have failed you. I have not taught you properly about the true nature of the church. I have told you about the sin and error in the church. I have told you about unfaithful people in the church. I have told you about failures and leaders who have the wrong emphasis. So, if many in this congregation have a bad image or an erroneous view of the church I have to shoulder much of the blame.

Let me make some correctives this morning. First, we need to understand that fellowship--or community--with like-minded believers is not a right or an obligation. No, to fellowship with people of like mind and like commitment is a privilege of grace.

Did you hear me? To be in a church like Central is not a right or obligation, it is a privilege of grace. Jesus didn't have the privilege of working among like-minded believers. No, he lived in an unbelieving world which crucified him. Paul languished in prison. Luther fled for his life. Calvin retreated to Geneva because of enemies. Isn't that always the case? It is out there--in an alien, unbelieving world where our mission lies--in the school, the market, the office, the courts, the store, the street--there is where our work lies. Yes, and also in a wicked, unbelieving church.

Do you know how Luther put it? He wrote, "The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people, but the devout people...if Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared.

Yes, the business of Christians does not lie among fellow Christians or like believers. Our business lies in the world, among the unbelievers, among the unfaithful. There we are called upon to lay down our lives for Jesus, there we are to take up our cross and follow him. There we are to put all we have and are at risk that some might be saved. To retreat to an enclave of like believers, to run off to a fellowship of like minded is to betray our Lord. Yes, the fellowship we have is a privilege of grace, not a right.

The second thing I want to say about the church is this: the thing that holds us together is Jesus Christ. It isn't the Westminster Confession of Faith or any other creed. It isn't our same social level or educational level or economic level or that we are mostly Republicans. No, the only thing that truly holds us together is Jesus Christ and our common commitment to him. You know, it isn't even the Bible--no, it is Jesus only.

See how it works. If someone comes to you and says, "how can I be saved?" What do you do? Do you point to the Bible? Do you point to our Confession of Faith? Do you point to our system of government? Do you point to our Church? No--the only thing you can point to is Jesus Christ. And there are people who never heard of the Presbyterian Church, who never heard of the Westminster Confession, who never heard of representative Government--and still they are saved--they are children of God--all because of Jesus.

Do you understand that? The thing that holds us together is our common commitment of Jesus. There are remote and isolated people in the world who do not even have the Bible in their native tongue. Some have only parts of Scripture in their native language. One of our members, Rhonda Boaz, is a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators who is working to put the Bible in the language of those who don't have it. But let me tell you this--just to have the Bible in their native language isn't going to save those people. The only thing that will save them is Jesus and without the Bible or with only parts of it, when they hear about Jesus and respond to him, they are saved and they are a part of the church and they are a part of our brotherhood. The standard of orthodoxy isn't what someone believes about the Bible, but the standard is what we believe about Jesus. Isn't that the questions Jesus himself asked? He said, "What do you think of the Christ?" (Matthew 22:42)

The basis of our fellowship is Jesus. We don't judge our fellowship on anything else. For example, we don't say, "What do you think about church property?" We don't ask, "What do you think is the best church government?" We don't ask, "what is your view of scripture?" We don't ask anything but this: what think ye of Christ? That is the basis of our fellowship.

The third thing I want to say about the church is this: the church is a divine fact--it is a divine fact, but it is not an ideal organization. Now, a lot of us would like to make it into an ideal organization. You see, most of us have in our minds an idea of what the perfect church should be. But then things happen in the real church that don't fit that ideal and we begin to say, "well, this can't be the real church because in the ideal church this wouldn't happen." People say such things as, "Well, the church is filled with hypocrites (I always say, well come on and join--one more won't matter!). Christians act one way on Sunday and another way on Monday through Saturday." Well, all of that is true about the church and about us Christians. And anybody who thinks the church is better than that is in for a big disappointment.

But my dream about an ideal church is an illusion--God didn't give us a perfect church any more than he gave us perfect people. The church is a fellowship where there is much weakness, little faith, and great difficulties. It is a fellowship of inadequate people, of stingy givers, of reluctant workers, of self-righteous elders, of petty people who think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. It is a fellowship of sinners who gossip, who lie, who deceive, who cheat, who are proud. It is a fellowship burdened down with its sins and its misunderstandings.

But it is more. it is a fellowship where the sinning brother is still a brother. It is a fellowship where my sinning brother and my sinning self stand under the loving, forgiving Jesus. Neither of us can live by our own words or our own deeds. No, we can live only by that Word who is Jesus.

Well, that is what the church is. God didn't give us a perfect fellowship and no matter how hard we look for it, we will never find it. What God has given us is a brotherhood of sinners who are forgiven and who are called on to go out into the sinful world to give ourselves for him who has given himself for us.

Yes, the place of the church is out in the world among our enemies, giving our lives for lost sinners just as Jesus came into a world that hated him and he gave his life for that world. Jesus could have stayed off in the hills of Galilee or the remote corners of Samaria and no one would have troubled him. But Jesus said, "I must go to Jerusalem", (Matt. 16:21) and the Bible says, "He set his face steadfast to go to Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51)

God is always dealing with leftovers. There is no pure church, only remnants. To think that we are pure or that there is some pure fellowship to which we can withdraw is a illusion. We are not pure nor is there any such fellowship. Yet, God calls us forgiven sinners to go into the world and if need be to lay down our lives for him.

Does that make sense to you? We can never run away from the duty to go into the sinful world to witness for Jesus. We are all sinners saved by grace and the only thing that holds us together is Jesus, our Saviour.

In John, chapter six, we are told how Jesus wanted to feed the multitudes but his disciples complained that all they had was a little boy with five barley loaves and two fish. "What are they among so many?" they asked. (John 6:9) But when they took what they had and put it in the hands of Jesus, he fed them all and there was enough and to spare. The church--weak, sinful, inadequate isn't much. It is filled with error and sin and failure. But when we take it and put it in the hands of Jesus, he feeds a hungry, needy world. No, the church isn't much, but it is what God gave us. And when we trust him, it is enough.