

The Communicator

First Christian Church, Russellville, KY September 2020
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Greeting,

Why should we meet in person for Worship?

Over the past few months, most churches have stopped meeting in person. The global pandemic, government regulations, and a desire to serve each other and society have kept us from gathering. Instead, we've held "services" online and used technology to connect.

Many churches are now resuming in person worship, or will soon. But these new worship services feel strange. Our sensitivities are heightened, our differences are on display, and we have to endure restrictions and protocols that are awkward, inconvenient, and to say the least frustrating. Then, no matter how safe we make it, some of our church family still can't come.

With all this in mind, some believers may feel tempted not to come at all. They say, if our restored worship is so different and restricted, our online options so available and convenient, and our physical presence is a vulnerability, why should we even meet in person?

This is a valid question! But before we make our decisions, we need to think about the importance of our gatherings so that our desire to meet grows instead of fading.

So unless you're someone who needs to stay home for health reasons, here are several reasons to come back to church.

We're embodied creatures.

God made Adam from earth's soil, Eve from Adam's side, and humanity from their union (Gen.1:26-27; 2:18-25; 3:20). We're embodied souls, male and female, in His image. We're not just pixels and screen-names, headshots on Zoom and Facetime. We're human beings. We're designed to see and hear and taste and touch and feel our way through the physical world God's made. In recent months, we've seen the power of our online world. But we've also felt its limitations. No loving couple gladly accepts a "long-distance relationship" as ideal. Neither should a loving church family.

The church is one body.

The Bible consistently teaches that the church is Christ's body on earth (Eph.1: 22-23). Each believer is a different body part, but we're intricately knitted together (Eph.4:15-16). We're not independent but interdependent. Our spiritual gifts are like eyes and ears and hands and feet each playing their part in the body's growth and mission. Yes, even at a distance, we're still Christ's body. But like any healthy body, we shouldn't want to stay dislocated.

The Spirit is drawing us.

Not only are believers one body; we also have one Spirit (Eph.4:4). The Holy Spirit always draws us toward unity. God's Spirit can't be divided, so believers should not be separated involuntarily.

We're a spiritual family.

In the church, God is our adoptive Father, so we're all spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. (I Tim3:15; 5:1-2). Families aren't meant to be separated. Healthy families live together, laugh together, cry together, and help each other.

There's nothing like singing together.

There's no experience on earth like a group of people singing together (Ps.95:1-2). Singing together glorifies God and invigorates the hearts of God's people. Singing together fills our minds with truth and warms our hearts with grace. Singing together symbolizes our unity as we harmonize. Singing together expresses our emotions to God. But we don't just sing to glorify God; we also sing to encourage each other (Col.3:16). And we can't sing to each other through a screen.

We need communion together.

Every believer needs to see and taste these gracious symbols so that we can sense the gospel story once again. Communion reminds us that God communicates to us in sensory ways. The broken bread and fruit of the vine helps us remember and celebrate His ultimate sacrifice (Matt.28:19; I Cor.11:26).

You have a job to do.

If you're a believer, you have a job to do when the church gathers. The work of ministry is for every Christian. Every believer has spiritual gifts meant to be used, and every church body desperately needs every body part to be active (Rom.12:4-8; Eph.4:15-16; I Pet.4:10-11).

Our worship is a witness.

Each week our friends, neighbors and coworkers walk through the same broken world we do, but without our hope and faith. Each week they suffer challenges and tragedies that make them wonder where grace and truth can be found. Yes, there are ways we can minister online, and we should rejoice that God's now reaching new people with new methods. But the unbelieving world also needs to see the gospel's transforming power embodied in a local family of Christians who love God and serve each other.

Greetings change lives.

It may seem strange to end with the act of greeting but it's such a simple activity that's become so restricted and complicated. Throughout the New Testament, the writers not only greet the churches but ask Christians to greet each other. These greetings aren't just an afterthought tacked onto the end of their letters. These greetings symbolize the reconciling power of the gospel and foster our church family. The way we greet each other and the fact that we greet each other is central to the church's life and witness. Happy greetings remind us of the gospel unity we enjoy in Christ. Greetings declare that the healthy church shows no partiality. Every greeting reflects God's love, reunites Christ's body, enables hospitality, cultivates selflessness, opens doors for ministry, and bears witness to the God who's welcomed us through Christ. Even if these greetings are masked, touchless, and distanced, they're still life-shaping events in every church. We need to see each other because greetings are the happiest moments in the life of Christians.

You may not be able to return right away. You might need to exercise caution for yourself or those you love. You might need to keep watching from a distance for a while. But when the time is right, God's people can and must gather again, and I hope you'll join us soon. After all, our worship is ultimately a taste of heaven. The Bible's vision of heaven doesn't look like a quarantine, a livestream, or a Zoom call. It's a "face to face" encounter with the risen Christ and a worshipful reunion of both saints and angels. In Heaven we won't be segregated in mansions of glory, but living, working, loving and serving together in a new world where only righteousness dwells. So let's gather together again in person.

Your Pastor