

All right. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. I am so glad you are here, and I am so glad to be here today. Hope is here. Everyone is welcome. Jesus changes everything. Not something we just say. It's something we believe. That the goodness of God is here. That no matter where you've been or what you have done, you are wanted and you are welcomed, and Jesus changes everything. And so, what a great summer it's been here at Valley Creek. It's been a great summer. Can you believe it's already August? Summer is winding down. School's about to kick off, and we had a great summer here. We had Kids Summer. We had Students Summer. We had an amazing Gen Hope Night. Our first-ever, We Are Gen Hope student album is outstanding. We had some amazing young adult experiences and hangouts. We had some great mission trips, some incredible Serve the City projects. And I thought our team did an amazing job with 60 Days of Summer. So many different communicators from different seasons of life bringing forward the truth of Scripture, lifting up our heads, pointing us to Jesus and His promises. I thought they did an outstanding job. And if you're newer with us I think it's so important for you to understand that we are a church that believes in shared leadership. Which just means we believe we're better together. We are not built on the gifts of a few but on the sacrifices of many. And our team is raised up. You are raised up to lead and use the gifts and callings and passions and talents in your life. And I think it's so important for you to know that 95% of our staff were regular people, just like you, who have just been raised up in this family. Like what I'm trying to tell you is they're not career ministers. Some of them are just like you. They were sitting there. They felt called by God. They wanted to be more involved. They felt God was doing something in their life. They came on staff, some for a season, some for a lifetime. But if they weren't working on this staff, it's not like they're going to go to another church and work on another church staff because they're career ministers. No, they're just regular people who love what God is doing in this family, in this time, in this season. And one of the things that we say is we want to do this a long time together. We want to be deeply rooted and we want to have kind of a long obedience in the same direction. And the only way that happens is if we live free and stay healthy. And so, every summer I take a little bit of time off to pray and reflect and think and spend time with my family and seek God for what's next. And I'm coming back from my summer break this summer incredibly grateful.

Like here's what I just want to say to you. We have a really good thing going here. I don't know if you're aware of it. I don't know if you think about it. I don't even know if you care. But I spent the last couple of weeks thinking and praying and processing. We have a really good thing going here. I am so grateful for the vision and the values and the culture of this place. I am so grateful for our staff and our leadership. I am so grateful for you. I am so grateful for our facilities and our finances and the work of God in this place. Like we have a really good thing going. And so, I'm coming back just full of gratitude. And I see God at work. I mean, just in this last week, here's three stories for you. Last Sunday after service, a guy in our church who's incredibly successful in every way, shape, and form you can think of was so moved by God. His family had lunch reservations and they were like, "Come on, dad, we got to go." And he was like, "No. Here's the keys. You guys go to lunch without me. I need to stay because I need more of God and I need to go and get some prayer." And so, he didn't come for prayer

because something was wrong. He came for prayer because something is so right in his soul. He's hungering and longing for more of the things of God. I could tell you about a senior boy in our church who is giving up his senior varsity hockey season so he can do Student Leadership. And he said, "I would rather Student Leadership be the select sport of my life in this season than put all my time into that because I want more of God." I can tell you about a woman this last week who was in a traumatic, tragic accident. And when she came to in the accident and blood was pouring down her head and broken bones all over her body, she was about a mile away from anyone or help in any way. And she thought, "I have no idea how I'm going to get to help." And the Holy Spirit brought Psalm 23 up into her mind. And for over a mile, she quoted Psalm 23 over and over and over again. Yeah. That thing that we all memorized in the spring together. Yeah, it was there when she needed it because she put it inside of it and God gave her the strength to find help and healing and wholeness.

So, it's like God is moving. And if you look at the larger narrative, you look at the bigger landscape in the world around us, in the church at large, here's what you can see. You can see there's a shaking. There's a sifting. There's a pruning. God is dropping his plumb line. He's leveling things out. He's bringing His church into alignment and He is calling His people back to himself. And that is a great thing. And so, I'm so excited about what God is doing on the earth. And I'm so excited about what God is doing here. And so, before we run off into this fall semester and get going together, I know it's hard to use the word fall when it's 150 degrees outside, but it is that time of year. And before we go run and do all that, I just wanted to take today, and I just kind of want to reorient us. I want to bring an orientation to you, whether you're new or you've been here for a long time and just kind of remind ourselves, what are we doing? Like, do you ever just stop and ask yourself that question? Like, what are we doing? Why are we here? What are we all about? What is this all for? Like, why are you here today? You have a good answer for that question? Like what is the church and why does it even matter in the first place? Like is the church religion? Is it an organization or an institution? Is it a building? A service, a weekend experience? Is it entertainment? Is it a voting block? Is it a group of social do-gooders? Is it a community? Like what is the church? Why does it matter? And why are you here? So, let me try to reorient us before we go running off into the fall. Because it's really hard to align yourself with something you're unaware of. And it's really hard to be passionate about something that you don't know. Okay? So, are you with me on this? So, let me just try to answer the question, why you're here today and what we're doing.

You see, if you look all throughout the New Testament, here's what you'll discover. The church as a noun, person, place, or thing. What is it? Here is a simple definition for you. The church is simply the people of God united by the Spirit of God under the lordship of Jesus, sent on mission to bring the hope of the kingdom to the world. A little bit clunky, but it catches the heart of it. The church is the people of God. The people of God called by God unto God for God. People who are holy and set apart. Citizens of the kingdom. People who are in this world, but are not of this world. People who live by a completely different reality that are on a journey together as the family of God. The people of God united by the Spirit of God. The moment

you put your faith in Jesus, the Spirit of the living God comes inside of your life. He now marks you as a believer, as the people of God, as one of the chosen set apart ones. And the Spirit of the living God is uniting us all together. The same Spirit that's in you is the same Spirit that's in me. Therefore, what's uniting us together is infinitely greater than anything that could ever divide us. And the Spirit is literally baptizing or immersing or uniting you and me into the body of Christ. And not only that, but if the Holy Spirit is in the great fellowship of the Trinity then when we are filled with the Spirit of the living God, He is literally immersing you into the very community of the Trinity itself. United by the Spirit under the lordship of Jesus. Jesus is the leader. He is the one we follow. He is the one we submit and surrender to and obey. He is the one that we've chosen to become like. And we are now His body and His family and His bride sent on mission to bring the hope of the kingdom to the world. We have a mission. We don't exist for ourselves. We exist for the world that they might come to know the name of Jesus and live in His kingdom. That's a really simple definition, the noun of the church.

And if you read through Scripture, what you'll discover is that the first time the word church is ever used, it comes out of Jesus's mouth, which means it's His idea. And He's having a conversation with the disciples about who people say that He is. And this is incredibly important. "He says to the disciples, 'Who do the people say the Son of man is?'" Talking about Himself. "They replied, 'Some say you're like John the Baptist. Others say Elijah and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you? Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock, I will build My church.'" First time it's ever said, "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Here's what so important. The first time the word church is used in the Bible comes directly after the disciples for the first time ever declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Up until this point, they've never said that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. They know He's a good guy, a teacher, a religious man, a prophet of God. But it's in this moment when they declare He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus then tells them about the church. In other words, your view of who Jesus is will determine your view of what the church is. He can't give you the revelation of the church until you first have a revelation of who He is. If I have a high view of Jesus, I'll have a high view of the church. If I believe that Jesus is who He says He is and did what He said He did, then I will believe that the church is who He says she is and can be who He says she can be. But if I have a low view of Jesus, I'll have a low view of the church. If I believe Jesus is just a prophet, a good man, a religious figure, then I believe the church is irrelevant, optional, and peripheral. Could it be that the church has a low view of the church because the church has a low view of Jesus? Until I see Him as everything. I won't see the church as His everything. If I see Jesus as good, I'll see the church as great. But if I see Jesus as optional, then I'll see the church is optional. The first time they had a revelation of who He was, He comes right on the backside and gives them the first revelation of the church because it takes faith and revelation to see Jesus for who He is. And it takes faith and revelation to see the church for who He says the church is. This is really important. Which means if you want to have a higher view of the church,

you want to help your children love the church. You want to help your spouse love the church. You want to help the world love the church. Don't talk to them about the church. Talk to them about Jesus. Because they can't have a high view of the church until they have a high view of Jesus. They can't have an accurate view of the church until they have an accurate view of Jesus. Who do you say that He is? Until He becomes Christ, the Son of the living God, church will never be family on mission. It will just be another religious thing. Because John the Baptist, Elijah, and the prophets were just religious figures, so the church becomes a religious institution. Does this make sense to you?

But when Jesus is the beloved Son of God, church instantly becomes family on mission. And it becomes important to me because it's important to Him. And He says, "I will build My church." First time the words are used, it comes out of Jesus's mouth, which means the church is Jesus's idea. It's not my idea or your idea or man's idea. Or some ancient figure somewhere along the way who thought, "I know, let's do this. Let's get people, put them in a building. Have some lights and video, three songs. Do a little announcement, and then preach for 30 minutes." No, it was Jesus's idea. And it was Jesus's dream. He's talking about the church before the church even happened. The church doesn't happen until Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit's poured out. Jesus was dreaming about the church before the creation of the world. He was dreaming about Valley Creek Church in 2024 while He was on His way to the cross. It's his dream. The church belongs to Jesus. He takes possession. My church. This is not your church or my church. It's His church. He's very clear about that. And the church is the thing He is doing. I will build My church. The church is the epicenter of God's work on this earth. We want God to be a part of what we're doing. God says, "I want you to come and be a part of what I'm doing." What I'm doing is I'm building my church. Not a building, not an organization. The people of God, united by the Spirit of God under the lordship of Jesus sent to bring the hope of the kingdom to the world around them. Are you with me on this? And when I will align my life with what's important to God, look at what happens. I love this verse. "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord," the Church of Jesus, "shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age. They will be fresh and flourishing." When you align your life with what God is doing, you will flourish in every way, shape, and form. Those who are planted, deeply rooted in the house of the Lord will flourish. It says you'll be like a palm tree. Which means you'll be able to withstand life's storms. You'll be like the cedars in Lebanon, which means you'll be people of nobility. People of purpose, people who are long and straight and true and disease-resistant and rot-resistant. It says, "You'll bear fruit in old age." Did you ever notice how people who are old, who have been deeply rooted in the church are incredibly fruitful? It's amazing. And they're fresh and flourishing. No matter what's happening. Find somebody in life who is truly fresh and flourishing according to the kingdom. You will find that they are deeply rooted and planted in the house of the Lord.

Now I get it. Some of you are like, "Bro, I came to church not to really hear about the church today." I know, right? Like I get it. Like the church can feel so irrelevant. It can feel so foolish. It

can feel so illogical. But here's what we have to remember. It's that the wisdom of God is foolishness to man. And the wisdom of man is foolishness to God. In fact, look what it says. "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. Can we all just agree that in this world, the church is foolish, weak, lowly, despised, and is not. Anyone want to agree with that? If not, just come into the city with me sometime when people find out what I do, and you'll quickly realize that the church is foolish, weak, lowly, despised, and is not in the world's eyes. But He chose it. And it is the wisdom of God, which means it is divine in nature. And it is the very thoughts of heaven. I want to align my life, not with logic and understanding according to man, but with the very wisdom of God, even though it might be foolishness to me. Forget the, to me, it feels foolish sometimes. But if He says it's the wisdom of God, then it is the very narrative of heaven. And I want to align my life with that. You with me on this? I mean, catch this. "In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." It says the church is the dwelling place of God on this earth. A holy temple to the Lord. A dwelling place in which God lives. You are the temple of the Lord. And God does not live in temples made by man's hands. He lives in people resurrected by the Spirit of the living God. God doesn't live in buildings built by man's hands. No, He lives in people resurrected by the Spirit of the living God. So, you are the temple of the Lord. But when we all come together, He assembles all these little temples into one big temple that literally becomes the dwelling place of God. This is literally the dwelling place of God on earth. "Surely God is in this place and I was not aware of it. Surely God is among us and I did not know it." "Where two or three are gathered, there Jesus is also." "He inhabits the praises of His people." This is none other than the gateway of heaven. This is an open heaven where God chooses to make His home. When was the last time you thought about this? It's the very dwelling place of God. Think of the language, the Old Testament temple. They knew God was there. When they went to the temple, they went to meet with God. They didn't go to a service or an event. They didn't go to be entertained or consumed. They went to meet with God and they knew He was there. So, they would come with this awe and this wonder and this reverence and this respect and this sobriety. And this sense of anticipation and excitement and joy and hope and faith that I'm not going to an event. No, I'm bringing my sacrifice because I'm going to meet with God. Because this is His dwelling place.

Could there be an opportunity for us to maybe repent and renew our mind and once again see this as the place He says He dwells? Because I think sometimes we gather. Sometimes I gather with way too much casualness. Way too much optionalness, way too much consumer nature. Way too much this is common and it's not really sacred. We're just kind of a bunch of people. And kind of, you got to warm me up, get me going, get my favorite song. Like, "Get me there, bro." But you're not here for me or for the band. This is the dwelling place of God. The Spirit of the living God. Jesus is baptized. Baptism descended upon Him. That was going to be the

dwelling place of God. The Holy Spirit is still looking for the Body of Christ to dwell upon. You and me in this time and this place. And if this is the dwelling place of God, no wonder Satan hates it. He wants there to be no home for God on this earth. Why? Because what happens in the very dwelling place of God, people are resurrected. Life is released. People are forgiven and set free. Demons are driven out and destinies are declared. And hope is restored. And marriages are brought back together and children are raised up in the ways of God. Satan does not want there to be a dwelling place. So no wonder he wants to offend you, remove you. Make it optional because he doesn't want God to have a home on this earth. I mean look at it, "The church of God, which He bought with His own blood." The church to Jesus wasn't cheap, casual or convenient. It wasn't like a fire sale He bought at the checkout counter on his way out. Like, they'll take a church too. This cost Him everything. When was the last time you thought about what it cost Him so that we could be His dwelling place? Or how about this? It says, "For if I am delayed, you will know how the people ought to conduct themselves in God's household." What is a household? It's a place where you live with your family. This is God's place where He lives with his family. It's not entertainment, performance. Three points, three songs, whatever you think it is. It's the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. In fact, we're actually the pillar and the foundation of truth in this world. We're supposed to live as stars in this crooked and depraved generation so that the world can see through our faithful witness what is good, what is true, and what is right in Jesus' name. This is the dwelling place of God. And we have to re-remind ourselves that that's what it's all about.

And so, if that's church as a noun, what is church as a verb? When we have church, we go to church. We're doing church. We're being the church. Church that was the noun we talked about. What's church as a verb? Church as a verb is, we meet with God, we serve each other as the Body of Christ, and we grow as disciples and make disciples. This church has a verb as an action. We meet with God. Do you realize the primary calling? The primary reason you were created was to worship God. "For you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation of people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into light." Primary calling on your life is to worship God. So, when we come together, we are here to minister to God. To worship God, to honor God, to praise God, to lift up the name of God. And we don't come to have an event. We come to meet with God. And God is here. And God is speaking. And God is healing. So, right now, God is healing some of you from even the past and broken thinking, just even in this moment. Why? Because we're here. We're meeting with God together and we're teaching His word. And we serve each other as the Body of Christ. This is church. Now you are the Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. To each one a gift is given for the common good. In other words, everyone that's a follower of Jesus has been placed in the Body of Christ. You're a part of it and you've been gifted. God has given you gifts that we need to build and strengthen people. Don't think programs again. Don't think institution or organization. Think people. We're here to serve one another as the Body of Christ. And this is where we deny ourselves. We pick up our cross. We become part of something bigger than ourselves. And we use our gifts like encouragement and mercy and generosity and leadership and administration and worship. We use our gifts to build and strengthen the body.

And if we don't serve each other, if there's not some level of service you receive and some level of service, you give while you're gathering as the church you didn't have a church. You didn't have church because we need to build and strengthen each other up so we become the full measure of the Body of Christ. And we grow as disciples and make disciples. Jesus's command is, "Go make disciples of all nations." So, we gather and we come in as students, learners, followers saying, "I'm here to become like Him." So, I'm not here to consume or be entertained. I'm actually here with a spirit of obedience. I actually showed up to say, "God, help me become more like You because I've chosen in my life to follow You. So, I'm here to learn, to grow. And then I want to be a part of Your mission on this earth and make disciples." So, can I ask you a really honest question? Is this how you do church? Is this how you do church? And if not, that's okay. What a season where God is sifting and shaking and calling His church back to Himself to say, "Hey, let me remind you. It's about meeting with Me and serving each other as the Body of Christ." What a privilege and responsibility. And we're growing as disciples and making disciples. That's church as a noun, church as a verb. Don't ever let the world tell you what something is that belongs to God. Don't let the world define something that belongs to God. Let God define it. Don't let your personal experience define what belongs to God. Just let God define what belongs to God and then choose in some way to align your life with it. We've got to orient ourselves again to what is church. So, you're with me on this? Okay.

So, now what's the unique expression here at Valley Creek? Because this is church, but there are local churches all over the place and every church has a unique expression that God has asked them to be in this time, in this place. It must be consistent and align with everything that we just talked about. But then there are unique flavors and facets that God is releasing in the world to reach people and develop people according to His will and His desire. So, who are we? This is reorienting you in alignment with all of this. We are a movement of hope for the city and beyond. This is our visual language. A movement of hope for the city and beyond; we're a movement of unique individuals who have come together from different walks of life. We submit our gifts, passions, and talents and time to a greater vision for an exponential impact. We're like a bunch of little streams that come together to become a river that shapes and carves the world around them. A movement of hope. Hope is not an emotion or a feeling. It's not wishful thinking. It's a person and His name is Jesus. And the hope of the good news that the rule and reign of God, the kingdom is at hand for the city and beyond. We don't exist for ourselves, we exist for the city. And this really represents our church family, Valley Creek. We say we're a Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled, life-giving church. Jesus-focused, we're more focused on what Jesus has done for us than what we have to do for Him. Spirit-filled, we want to walk in the character and the power of the Holy Spirit. And life-giving, we're on mission to receive and release the life of God wherever we go. And we say Jesus is the narrow gate that leads to an ever-widening life. And we would say this is a harbor of hope where people that are battered by life storms can come. We say we're a training center for life where we're trying to practice and train and be equipped to be elite disciples in Jesus' name. And we say this is a family on mission where we're beloved sons and daughters releasing our Father's kingdom. So, that's

who we are as a church. But then if you've been here, you see this thing called The Three Circles. We would just say this represents the gospel or our theology. Receive His grace, experience His presence, and release His kingdom. Identity, relationship, purpose. When I know who I am, I'll know who God is and I know what I'm created to do. If I believe I'm forgiven, I'll never be afraid of God and I'll spend my life building His kingdom. If I believe I'm a beloved son, I will run to the Father and I will spend my life building His kingdom instead of my own. But if I resist His grace, I'll avoid His presence and I'll spend my life doing my own thing. Religion says, "You got to do a bunch of stuff so that God will accept you so that eventually you can pay for your past and become." The Gospel says, "In Jesus, you already are. You're now free to do." Religion says, "You have to do in order to become." So, we are people who are drawn by grace, not driven by expectations. We are people of grace, presence, and kingdom. Most churches will take one of these and camp really deeply on one of them, and they do amazing, beautiful job that inspires me. When I see one of these circles taken all the way out to the nth degree, we just really believe that God has called us to live right here in the middle. People of grace, people of His presence and people of His kingdom.

And then, hope carriers. A hope carrier is simply a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. See, people come to the church for a program, not realizing that they are the program. We go on church websites and we look for what's the program. That's the church I want to go to. They have the programs. I'm like, "You're the program." We don't have any programs here. You're the program. Some of you are like, "Bing, now I get it." There you go. You're the program. You're the outreach strategy. Why? Because you're the thing that God is doing on this earth. So, you're the thing that we're focused on helping you be a disciple of Jesus, living our mission to change their world. See the kingdom of God is a movement of hope and the kingdom and the church are not the same thing. The church is a part of the kingdom, but the kingdom is the rule and reign of God. And He doesn't want it to just be in the church. He wants it in every area of life that you and I go every single day. And this is not sacred and these are secular. No, it's all sacred in Jesus' name because wherever you go, that's where the kingdom is. We're salt, light, and leaven scattered throughout these places. Salt to bring taste to a flavorless world. Light to shine in pitch black darkness. And leaven sprinkled into these areas of life causing the whole thing to rise and become what it was created to be in the first place. You were created to destroy the works of the devil everywhere you go and we believe that is true of your life. So, we're constantly trying to raise you up and send you into that space. And I'm sorry for pointing my finger. I'm just getting excited.

So, how do we do that? We're raising up generations of hope carriers. Generations of hope carriers. People who know who they are, who God is, and what they were created to do. People who have been deeply formed, who have experienced this deep transformation who are becoming people of love. Because we have nothing to offer the world until we become people of love. And we only do five things. I told you we don't have programs. We do five things. Less is more, simple is profound, but simple is complex. You know why your iPhone is awesome? Because it's super simple on the screen. You know how complex that thing is



underneath? It actually takes more complexity to make something simple. It's easy if I told you we did 98 things. That'd be very easy for us. It'd be very unfruitful, but it'd be very easy. It's very complex to be simple. We just do five simple things. We can experience this. We gather together as the people of God to meet with God, preach His word. Serve each other as the Body of Christ, grow as disciples, believing this is the dwelling place of God and that in God's presence, everything changes. And the weekend is essential in your life, but it is not sufficient. You need more than that and so we do Circles. Three or more people who get together in the week to discuss the weekend message, engage the Scriptures and pray together. And this really is from us, a revelation from the Lord, from Mark 4, the Parable of the Soils, where Jesus says, "A farmer goes out, sows his seed. Some fell on hard soil and it got snatched away. Some seed fell on rocky soil. It sprouted up real quick, but then it withered and it died. Some fell on thorny soil with thistles and it grew up, but it got choked out and never became fruitful. And then some fell on good soil and produced a 30-, 60-, 100-fold return." Same seed, same farmer, same experience. The only difference is the condition of the soil. Circles are where we work up the soil of our life so we can actually take the Word of God that's been preached over our lives so that it grows and it doesn't get choked out, snatched away or wither and die. We don't want to just be hearers of the word. We want to be doers of the word and consider carefully that which God has spoken to us. So, Circles are where we cultivate our hearts so we can experience growth. And we do serve teams, both in the church and outside the church. Teams, people get together, use their gifts, their talents. Kids, Students, Production, Worship, Safety, Operations, Circles, Guest Experience. There's so many teams in our church that serve as the Body of Christ every single week, but then we also have teams that we call Serve the City that once a month go out and do a significant project in the region. Can I just tell you? We don't talk about ourselves a lot. We don't tell a lot of the stories back. We should probably do it more, but there's reasons I don't. But in the last two years alone, our Serve the City teams from Gainesville to Lewisville have touched every single school, every single hospital, every single municipality, every single police center, every single fire department, every single healthcare program. I mean, every person in every one of those spaces has been touched at least once, if not multiple times in the last two years by our serve teams. That's what being a movement of hope looks like.

Then, we do spiritual practices. This used to be called resources, but every resource we create is for you to practice your faith in the week. This is, do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did. I haven't forgotten it. We're coming. Okay? Practices where you can experience deep spiritual formation. Then, transformative experiences. We used to call this leadership development, but really a better way of saying it is, we want to create experiences that have a beginning, middle, and end that are designed to bring deep transformation in your life so you can become like Jesus as a person of love. This is Kids Leadership, Student Leadership, VCLA, Men's Nights, RE. They have a beginning, middle, and end and the whole point is to transform you. Pretty simple. And if you look at Scripture, what you'll discover in the church, the New Testament church is, this is basically all they did. They got together and met with God. They gathered in each other's homes and talked about God. They were on teams

that served in the world around them. They did spiritual practices. They did what Jesus did in their own personal life. And they had these transformative moments like the upper room, like the Mount of Transfiguration that forever marked and shaped their life. That's all they did. And I know you're like, "But we should do more." I know because we say things like this. Paul said, "I've become all things to all people that I might reach some." So, we think the church should be all things to all people, but listen to me, if you become everything to everyone you won't be anything to anyone. And Paul wasn't telling the church of Corinth to do that. He was saying, "In my own life, I just try to meet people where they are so I can take them where God wants them to go." I think Paul would be like, "Hey, I think you should do five things." So, we have values that I don't have time to get into. Without values, you become a religious organization that just smashes each other. Selfishness, preference, division, fear, gossip. This is religion, man. We want nothing to do with this. This is a movement of hope confined by values of who we have decided to be. And we are one church that meets on multiple campuses that carries the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. One church. One vision. One set of values. One set of leadership, one heartbeat, one culture. Multiple campuses, five campuses right now, Argyle and University, they're planned. When we have the leaders and the serve team members that are willing to step up and lead the way and the resources to do it, we will do those. But multiple campuses, here's what it does. Instead of a campus pastor spending all week working on a message, they get to spend all week serving the city and making disciples. But it's the exact same service, exact same experience, exact same offerings. Why? Because we only do five things so it'd be really hard to get way off doing different things. Same thing, carries the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. Why? Because wherever you are, that's where we are. People don't form their opinion of Valley Creek based on the weekend experience and the building. They form it based on you. However you are and whatever they experience in your life, that's who we are because you're us. Make sense?

So, Online Campus, here's what I say to you. Wherever you are in the world, Africa, Canada, Buffalo, Florida, we love you. We see you. We are so for you. God is doing a great thing in that campus, especially as you guys engage with one another in relationship and take that awkward step across the worldwide web atrium and connect with each other. And in the last season, we've upgraded all of our cameras and our backend technology to make it a better experience for you. Denton Campus, here's what I say to you. You are our first campus. You're the first launch. You've been going for 10 years. You are a faithful witness in the City of Denton. You are literally a city on a hill, a light that cannot be hidden because you are literally on a hill that overlooks the City of Denton. And you have been a tremendous faithful witness. And in the last season, we've updated all the chairs, carpet and paint in your room to make it excellent as you keep reaching and serving people. Lewisville, here's what I say to you. You guys are a faithful witness in the City of Lewisville. You are reaching in this season people who are really far away from God. And they are finding hope and freedom and forgiveness in Jesus' name. You are a faithful witness and we love and celebrate you. And in this last season, we've updated all the audiovisual lighting in your worship center so you probably have the best weekend experience of any building that we have. Okay, Gainesville. Gainesville, you're just a couple years old. Hey,

Gainesville, do you realize you are one of the, if not, the largest church in Cooke County? There have been so many people that have been reached in this last couple of years. We love what God is doing. And here's what I want to say to you. Some of you, you've been coming for these last couple years, last season, and you've been sitting there wondering if this is real. If this is good, if this is true. I think it's time that you now realize this is real. This is good. This is true. And it's time to get in the game. It's time to say, "I'm ready to serve and I'm ready to give, and I'm ready to lead," because you're reaching so many people. We need more people to say, "I want to be a part of the Body of Christ doing what God is doing in this place." It's time to say, "This is my church. Give me a jersey. Count me in." And what's exciting for you is you've been parking up and down the street because there ain't no parking in this last season. We bought the lot next door. You will actually see the work already starting to happen when you walk out of the building today. So, by that, hopefully the end of this year you won't have to park on the street anymore because we now have more parking for you and all the people that you're reaching. And then, Flower Mound, you're the broadcast campus. You're the original broadcast campus, which means you are the cultural epicenter. How you engage, how you think, how you live impacts everything else we do. And so, many new people have joined us in this season. It's time for you to rise up and become the culture. Not just say, "This is my church and I kind of scatter here and there." No, no. Like, I am Valley Creek and so I want to know the culture and I want to become it. Because I want to send it out like, shockwaves in the world around me. And in the next season, we are going to, this fall, be completely overhauling the entire atrium to create a better experience for you for a Cafe, for relational space, discipleship space. We're actually going to put balcony seating up in that thing out there when you guys go out. You can see it. So, there's going to be a whole bunch of dust for a while, but it's going to be good for you and for all the other campuses, because this is where we host our central events. Whew.

Now, hang on because I'm not done yet. Some of you are like, "Why did you tell us all that? We don't really care." Here's my point. You should care. You should care because this is where God has planted you. And if nothing I said inspires you, moves your heart, makes you want to be a part, let me help you, encourage you, find a church that you can. That when they show their logo and talk about their beliefs and their visions and their values, something in your heart lights up because God has made you for that. And if that's not here, I'll be the first one to point you in the direction of what you're looking for. You should be so excited about the church that you're a part of. And if you're sitting here and you're like, "Dude, you talk so fast. I don't even know what you said." I get it. You want to know who Valley Creek is? That's it. That's it. I don't care. Don't remember anything we say about ourselves. Remember Jesus. Jesus is who we want to know, who we want to follow. Jesus is who I want to become like. Jesus is who I want to talk about and be around. Jesus is my one thing, my main thing, my only thing. "One thing I ask, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord." He is our treasure in the field. He is the only thing we care about. I mean, I love what Paul says when he says, "I resolve to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and with trembling and my

message, my preaching," my weekend experience church service, "was not with wise and pervasive words, but with the demonstration of the spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but God's power." This. Listen, I've done the persuasive words and the words of wisdom. I've spent so much time in all these years of doing this and trying to polish a message to get it just right. If I can state this statement and put it here and say, "This like that," and maybe make you smile here. And then, make you hopeful over there and step on your toes here, but not too much that it hurt. I polish, polish, polish, polish. Can I just tell you? I'm in a season where it's like I spend more time praying for the message and polishing it. Because persuasive and wise words don't work. They don't work. They might make you feel good for a day. They might give you a little bit of hype. They might try to. You need the Spirit's power. You don't want your faith to rest upon hype and energy and a moment and who else was there. We need Jesus. I mean, it says faith comes by hearing. You know what that means? Whatever you're hearing about your faith in that thing is gross. The number one complaint I've gotten all the years, shocking people complain in church, is that I don't spend enough time preaching about sin or worldly events. It's the number one complaint I've gotten. Listen to me. If faith comes by hearing, then you don't need somebody up here every week preaching about the strength of sin. Your faith is already too strong in it. You need someone up here preaching about the power of God's grace in your life because that's where your faith needs to grow. If I got up every week, just logically. Just sometimes I just wish we would just think as the people of God at large. Just think, if I got up every week and talked about politics, current events, social justice issues, global warming, crises in the world, the world's calendar, today is the national fajita day, whatever the thing is. We would never have time to talk about Jesus because we'd be so busy talking about all those other things. And here's the logic. The more clearly I see Jesus, the more clearly I see everything else. I don't need my faith to grow in the problem of politics. I need my faith to grow in that Jesus is Lord of all and that His kingdom is coming. Whatever you're looking at, you become like. "We, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit." The more clearly you see Jesus, the more clearly you see everything else, including the church.

Listen to me. When Isaiah, a prophet, a man of God, was taken into the throne room of heaven and saw God, his first response was, "Woe is me for I'm a man of unclean lips." Who told him he had unclean lips? Who told him there was room for more holiness and purity and depth and next level maturity in his life? No one. Because no one needs to say that to you when you see God. How about Peter? He fishes all night, catches nothing. Jesus gets in his boat and says, "Peter, go out there and let down your nets for a big catch." "Jesus, we fished all night. We haven't caught a thing. But because you say so, I'll do it." Throws his net over the boat. The net is so full of fish, it begins to break. He hits his knees and says, "Away from me, Lord, for I am a sinner." Who led him to that reaction and told him he was a sinner? No one. It was kindness that led him to repentance. He saw Jesus and he immediately saw everything else clearly. How about the woman at the well? Lives with five guys, married five times, living with a sixth man, meets Jesus at the well. He gives her springs of living water, and it says, she runs and leaves

her pail behind her and goes to the village and tells everyone to come and meet Jesus. Who told her to leave her past behind and go start living as a hope carrier? No one. Because when you see Jesus, you clearly see everything else. One more. How about Zacchaeus? A greedy, selfish, religious, worldly dude. And Jesus says, "Zach, I want to come to your house." And Zacchaeus stands up all on his own and says, "Look, Lord, here and now I give half of everything I have away to the poor. And if I've cheated anybody, I'm going to pay him back four times the amount." Who told Zacchaeus to be generous and to make restitution for his past? No one. But he saw Jesus and everything changed. The more clearly we see Jesus, the more clearly we see everything else. Hear me. I'm just about done. I get it. Okay? I see all of the worst stuff you think about the church. I see it. I see the sin and the pride and the selfishness. I see the bitterness, the idolatry, the adultery, the immorality. I see the judgement, the hypocrisy, the duplicity, the shame, the fear, the control. Like I see it all. But I also see the best parts of the church. The love and the humility and the service and the transformation and the spiritual formation and the resurrection and the reconciliation and the forgiveness and the fruits of the spirit. And the joy and the awe and the wonder and the supernatural life of God. And I will be the first one to tell you, it's messy. And yet Jesus says He's building His church and even hell can't stop it. And what He's doing is He loves the church and He gave Himself up for her, you, me, together to make us holy. Cleansing us by the washing with the water through the Word and to present her to Himself as a radiant church. Without stain or wrinkle or any blemish, but holy and blameless. Spend some time thinking about this verse this week. It says, "Jesus loves you, us, this, so much He's willing to pour Himself out to make you holy, to cleanse you, to wash you." To get rid of every stain and wrinkle and blemish. Every ungodly belief, every immoral action. Every temptation you can't overcome on your own. Every wound of the past, every brokenness that's been caused in your life by someone else. Every piece of the world that has been absorbed and attached to you like Velcro. All those things, He's washing and cleansing. Not just so you can do you. So, He can present you to Himself. Because what He wants more than anything else is you. He's making us radiant. I get it. I see it. I know it. All the things, right? You just, whatever you want to interpret all the things as great, all the things. And yet He says He's making us radiant.

Something that is radiant, like a diamond. It doesn't have its own light source. If there's no light, there's no radiate. Something that radiates, reflects in a brilliant way the light source of something else. We have no light of our own. He is the light. And when we allow Him to shine on us, we reflect His glory to the world in a multifaceted way that not one of us can do on our own. I just want us to be the kind of church that's worthy of being His bride. I just want us to be the kind of church that's worthy of claiming His name and His family. I just want us to be the kind of church that's worthy of being the Body of Christ of which He sits on as the Head because we're the very dwelling place of God. In this time, in this place, in this city. So, this is church. This is the noun. This is the verb. Is this what we're doing? Is this what you're doing? Here's why I wanted to take this week and do this. Because I just want you to be clear about who we are and what we're doing so you don't feel surprised or confused or disoriented. This is the premise of which I come every week. This is the premise of which I wake up every morning.

This is the premise. We are the people of God, united by the Spirit of God under the lordship of Jesus, sent on mission to bring the hope of the kingdom to the world. That's who we are. And what we're doing? We're meeting with God. We're learning how to serve each other as the Body of Christ and we're growing as disciples and making disciples. We might use different language, like a movement of hope for the city and beyond, and hope carrier, and all those things, but this is the premise. Is this your premise? Maybe as we rearrange our lives going into the fall. This might be one of the simplest ways to rearrange our thoughts to just say, "When I gather, I am literally coming with anticipation, expectation. I'm coming to the dwelling place of God." And if my behaviors reveal my beliefs, so if you want to know what you really believe about all of this, just look at your behaviors, how you engage with it. It will just tell you what you actually believe, not what you say. Because if I really thought I was meeting with God, can I just say this? I wouldn't come late. You're like, "I like the message till that." Because how could you come late to meet with the creator of the universe? I don't know. That's kind of like saying, "God, you wait on me." No, I'm coming here to wait on Him. I just got to make sure we have this in the right order. That this isn't actually about me. This is actually about Him and He's inviting me into it. And the greatest thing that can happen in my life is to be a part of it.

If I'm really here to serve and be the Body of Christ, then I have to actually have a relationship with anyone else in this place. I can't just come in. Even if I come on time, I can't just when it's over, just bang, peel out, bang, peel out the door. Got to beat the parking. Bang, got to get out the door. You're like, "Actually, I liked it until that point." Why? Because you can't rush out if there's a responsibility to serve and be served. You can't actually even become who you're called to be if you don't let other people release their gifts into your life. And then, we want to grow as disciples. Here's what I want to say. Like, who are you trying to become? Because you're a disciple of someone, of something. There's someone you're trying to become like. Who is better than Jesus that you're trying to become like? See, those would just be little things to think about. And I get it. All of it. And I know I went long. I haven't talked to you in two months. I got a lot to say, and this really matters. This really matters. And I promise you I'm done. Here's what I'm done with. The consumer church is dying. The committed church is rising. The convenient church is dying. The courageous church is rising. The selfish church is dying. You can see it. The servant-hearted church is rising. The duplicit church is dying. The devoted church is rising. Good American church is coming to an end. Kingdom come is being poured out on this earth. You get the choice of what you want to be a part of. And so, today I hope we oriented you in some way to say, this matters. This is worth it. I might not be ready to say, "Jesus have it all," but at least I can say, "Jesus have some more."

So, Jesus, thank You for today. Thank You for your church. Thank You that this is the dwelling place of God. I pray right now that even as we just wrap this up today, that You will leave all of us with something to think about, to meditate on, to be challenged or inspired by in some way this week. Jesus, I say to You, have it all at Valley Creek Church. Have every leader, every gathering, every moment, every serve team member, every dollar, every building, any and everything that is of us, anything that is part of our garden, would You have it all? And would

"What is Church?"

August 4, 2024 | Pastor John Stickl

You continue to wash us and cleanse us that we might radiate the very glory of God in this world around us? I pray for every person today, whether they're in the front row or the back row or hiding out somewhere in the middle, that today You came and You dwelled among them. The God of the heavens dwelled among us today. Speaking, healing, moving, breathing in a mysterious and yet powerful way. Jesus, have Your church, in Jesus' name. Amen.