

# The Church is Alive

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The Church above, beyond and before us

# What we covered last week

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- That the Church has responded to the cultural change around us in three broad movements:
  - Reactionary Movement / Accepting Movement / Proactive Movement
- All of these movements contain faithful examples of churches responding to cultural change in their own missional context (i.e. their city/town).
- No one movement has a monopoly on 'success', suggesting that God's mission for the Church transcends any particular movement.
- But what is God's mission for the Church?

# Opening Devotion

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Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbours, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' Count on it—there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she'll call her friends and neighbours: 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God."      Luke 15:4-10

# What we will explore today

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- What does scripture tell us about the “Church”?
- What do we mean when we say the word “Church”?
- How do these understandings relate to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God/Heaven?
- What is the relationship between God and the Church?
- As an expression of the Church of God in Whangarei, what does this relationship mean for us, our community and our mission in this place.

# “The Church” in Scripture

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The Church is referenced throughout the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul. These references come under four general titles. These titles are:

- *Ekklesia*
- *Oikos*
- The Body of Christ
- *Basileia / Ethnos*

# What do *you* mean by Church?

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How do these scriptural titles of the Church connect with your own understanding of:

- Structure
- Polity
- Experience
- Past Teaching

# The 'Kingdom' in Scripture

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Our main teaching on the kingdom is found in the parables of Jesus.

- "What is the kingdom of God like? It is like..."
- "The kingdom of God is..."
- The kingdom is marked by 'good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for those who are oppressed.' (Luke 4:18)

In the Gospels, Jesus' disciples are called to proclaim and live out this Kingdom.

# But didn't Jesus proclaim the Kingdom?

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The word *Basileia*, which was mentioned earlier, actually means Kingdom, the kingdom the Gospel writers report Jesus proclaiming.

Is there a distinction between the 'Church' as the New Testament describes it and the 'Kingdom' Jesus proclaims?

How does your experience of the Church relate to the parables and teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom?

Discuss this amongst yourselves over morning tea

# But didn't Jesus proclaim the Kingdom?

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The kingdom and the Church are not the same thing – *Basileia* and *Ekklesia* are not the same thing. The Kingdom is greater than the Church.

- The *Ekklesia*, Church, are those who are called out to live, proclaim and give expression to the reality of the kingdom.
- This has varying levels of success. We don't always do well.
- Thankfully the kingdom extends beyond human action, and is greater than the Church's works.
- Where in your experience have you seen the kingdom made manifest through the Church?

# God and the Church

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“Blessed are you, God of all creation; through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.”

ANZPB/HKMOA p. 420

- Our offerings are our response to God’s grace, and can offer glimpses of the Kingdom come. God chooses to work through the Church.
- The kingdom has come, however, regardless of whether these glimpses are shown. God can work beyond us.
- *Ekklesia* necessitates a calling agent. We (The Church) are... because God calls us to be.

# God and the Church

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The mission of the Church is not to be the original explorer, we follow in the way of God. God has already established a trading post in the new frontier, we build on the work God has begun.

- God touches the lives of people, we are 'called out' to meet them.
- We are not called to 'convert' people, rather to meet them where God has met them.
- We do not need to fear failure, as it is God's work.

We can be confident that "the gates of Hades will not prevail against" the Church, nor the work we are called to do in its name.

# Who, then, are we?

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We the Parish of Whangarei are, because God calls us to be.

- We are *Oikos* – We are called to be family (a household)
- We are *Ekklesia* – We are called to mission
- We are body of Christ – We incarnate the Church here
- We are *Basileia* – We witness to the greater kingdom

How well do you believe the Parish of Whangarei embodies these realities? What might hold us back from being them?

# From here to there

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Discuss what strategies we could put in place to develop our community as one which is:

- *Oikos* – Family/Household
- *Ekklesia* – Called out in mission with God
- Body of Christ – Christ incarnate in Whangarei
- *Basileia* – Witnesses to the kingdom of God

# What we'll look at next week

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Next week we will begin to look at us as Church.

- The legacy and spirit of this community.
- How we have come to be a people in this place?
- Where might God be calling us as the Parish of Whangarei in this city and district?
- What gifts and talents has God gifted us to do this work?