



Who Owns the Church?

Matthew 18:20 *For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.*

The question “who owns the church?” is one of those questions that has the most obvious of answers. It reminds me of that story about the children coming forward for the children’s sermon at Faraway Presbyterian Church. The minister sat down on the floor with the children and asked, “Kids, what’s green, hops, and sits on a lily pad?” After a long silence, one young person spoke up and said, “Well it sounds like a frog, but it must be Jesus!”

The church belongs to Christ, like a bride prepared for the bridegroom. The church is one body, the body of Christ. The church is now Christ’s hands and feet in the world. It is a worldwide institution of a thousand names but only one owner, our Lord. Having acknowledged that first, let’s talk more about church ownership.

People who love their church call it “My church,” not because they think they own it, but because they have deep ownership in it, with their hearts. It is their lifeblood. It is the place they have spent some of the most significant moments of their lives: births (baptisms), deaths (funerals), marriages (weddings), Easter, and yes, Christmas. This is how good people come to “own” their church, not that they carry the deed to the church property nor try to run it or control it, but they care most deeply for it, knowing that it has been the place of those most significant times in their lives as well as times to come. And no matter how close each of us becomes in our personal relationship with Christ, our corporate relationship as a church will matter to good Presbyterians.

Others don’t say “my church,” but “I go to church at...” You may think I am only arguing semantics here, but I think the words matter. “My church” or “our church” speaks directly to our relationship to the people, the building, the grounds. Church is a holy place where we go to be in the presence of Christ and each other. When we “go to a church,” I think the words imply that we are not happy there, that the particular church has let us down, or that church will surely let us down soon. The church we can “own” is the one that brings us peace. When we just “go to a church,” we are undecided. We are not at peace, and we all should strive to be at peace.

Please don’t mistake this as a push for membership. One can say “my church” without being a member, and likewise, even a member can say “I go to church at...” Membership is great, and if you’re not a member I urge you to join us! But that’s not what I’m talking about here. I am talking about you owning an imperfect church, one with blemishes, mistakes, rudeness, forgetfulness, shaky climate controls, and sometimes more stress than peace. I ask you to do this because this is what Christ does, the one who owns the church. And we must show Christ and his love to each other.

I ask you to take ownership in your church through your participation when you can. For most, involvement leads to a sense of ownership. 50 people came to dinner Wednesday night. 50! Some brought food to share. Some helped pay for the meat the church provided. Everyone had a way to take ownership, even if they just washed dishes or handed out napkins. Some were unable to come, and some cannot come. But these are held dearly hearts.

I know that we can talk about the glory days of our church gone by. But I see it a different way-a new way. I am looking to what we can become, growing in our faith, loving each other and serving together, and taking ownership in First Presbyterian Church.

Christ’s Church. Our Church. My Church.

Peace, Ron

Next Week’s Daily Bible Readings

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<i>Growing with God’s Word and Pursuing Justice and Peace</i>			Wednesday	October 10	Isaiah 5:8-30
Sunday	October 7	I Corinthians 11:17-34	Thursday	October 11	Isaiah 6:1-13
Monday	October 8	Isaiah 3:1-15	Friday	October 12	Isaiah 9:8-10:4
Tuesday	October 9	Isaiah 4:2-5:7	Saturday	October 13	Isaiah 11:1-16