BC art. 27; I Kings 19:1-10; 18; Eph. 2:11-22; The Church of Jesus Christ I. The Establishment of the Church II. The Preservation of the Church III. The Holiness of the Church

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how many churches have you attended in your life? I imagine that most of us have walked through the door of at least 10 different churches in your life- some of you many more than that. Right here in Lynwood we have 8 different churches to choose from. When you are asked- what church do you belong to? Most of us answer that we belong to Lynwood URC- which is true. But you could also answer this question like this- I belong to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ! The fact is, there is only one church- the true church of Jesus Christ. Salvation is found in this sacred assembly alone! The church has been compared to a temple- a holy structure made up of living stones built on the one cornerstone. It is also compared to a body made up of many different parts but united in its head. We also read that the church is the flock, the sheep of His pasture. His family- adopted sons and daughters. The church is also called the synagogue- the ekklesia or the gathering of God’s people. Since we read in Heb. 10 that we should not forsake the gathering of God’s people, it follows that we should have a good idea exactly what is the make up of this group of people who are called God’s people. So today we are going to consider this theme: Jesus Christ gathers His church out of this world.

**I. The Establishment of the Church**

In our first point we consider the makeup of this that we call church. Where does the church come from and how does it appear on earth. We confess that there is a church- and that this church is one. The church is the community of those who are chosen by Christ- gathered out of this world from the beginning of the world until its end as we confess in LD 21. So the church is defined as a gathering of a group of people whom have been gathered by Jesus Christ. As Jesus promised in Matthew 16- I will build my church. So it is Jesus as the good shepherd who gathers His sheep- Jesus as the master and owner who builds the house which is His church. This community is gathered from all nations and are united in Christ. So how many churches are there? Well, technically speaking there is only one church. If the church is a group of people that Jesus is saving- He saves one group. There is not an OT church and a NT church per say- but rather one church gathered from the beginning of the world to the end. And this church is gathered from all nations as well. As Isaiah 49 teaching, I will make you a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the church. This gets at the heart of the universal or catholic church. Catholic not in the sense of a Roman Church- but little “c” catholic meaning universal or ecumenical church. There is one, common church that those who are members of Christ share. The universal aspect of the church means that God is gathering His people from every tribe, tongue and language- from the beginning of the world until the end. As God promised Abraham in Gen. 22- all nations will be blessed by your seed. So no nation is excluded- and no time period is void. Although the OT saints believed in the promised Messiah and were gathered from the Hebrew people in the main- that does not put them outside of Christ. And now, in the NT era, the church is made up of predominately Gentiles who now believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ- the fact is- we are united as members of this one church. As we read in Eph. 2- the Gentiles were once far off but now they have been brought near by the blood of Christ! Jesus has broke down the dividing wall that once separated Jew and Gentile- creating in Himself one new man- so making peace and Eph 2:15 put it. And again in Eph. 2:18- through Him we both have access in the one Spirit to the Father. Did you catch that- through Jesus we both- both Jew and Gentile- have access to the Father. The Jews have access to the Father through Jesus- and the Gentiles have access to the Father through Jesus! Peace to those far off and peace to those who are near- Paul says. That is why we confess the one, true church. This true church is united to Christ by faith- united as the body is held together under the one head. No nation group is excluded- no group has a leg up. Were 2 or 3 are gathered in His name- Jesus is there with them and the church is there found on earth.

**II. The Preservation of the Church**

But this church is not only established- it is also protected. Not only has this church existed from the beginning as our article states, but this church will also last until the end! The church called and gathered is also the church preserved! This holy church is preserved by God against the rage of the whole world BC 27 says. Not only does Jesus call and gather, but He protects His bride! As Mt. 16 assures us, the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. The fact is, Satan has always tried to snuff out the church- to strangle the seed of the woman. It is the Devil’s desire to extinguish the light of the church. Just consider the attack of Cain on Able, Ishmael on Isaac, Esau on Jacob- and even Herod on the children of Bethlehem. Satan has and continues to attack the church- with both physical persecution and the pollution of false teaching. Our BC art. 27 references one such event where the Devil waged war against God’s people as we read in I Kings 19. Jezebel had killed all the prophets of the Lord that she could find, and Elijah was convinced that he alone was left. In Elijah’s mind- he was the last man standing. Take my life- he prayed- and give this world over to the powers of darkness. There will be no prophets, no saints, and no church. But unknown to him, the LORD had kept for himself some 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There was yet- even in this dark time- a remnant of true believers. So it may seem like the church is insignificantly small at times. It is despised in the eyes of the world. But that’s okay- since the world does not determine significance! The fact is – there will always be a church here on earth. Yes, at times small- but she will still be here! The gospel will still be preached- and the people of God will be singing His praise on earth! No political power and no spiritual principality will ever destroy it! The gates of hell will not prevail! It is Jesus who protects and preserves His body! Now this is a comforting truth- for those who are parents or grandparents. Perhaps you have been tempted to think- what will the state of the church be in 25 years? Well, I can tell you this- there will be church! That is not to say that every local, individual churches will flourish- some may be forced to move or close their doors- that can happen. But the church- the true church with a capital “C”- she will endure! As Acts 14:17 teaches- Jesus will not leave Himself without a witness! The Word will continue to go forth! And again in Psalm 46- God is in the midst of her, and therefore she shall not be moved. I know that we all tend to judge success based on numerical growth or greater influence- but the fact that God has promised to protect and preserve His people is a great blessing! A remnant will be saved from this world- while within this world- even as the world tries to destroy it! Jesus prayed for this in John 17- my prayer is that you not take them out of this world but rather that you keep them safe from the Evil One in this world! Success is certain- not the kind of human, worldly success- but the persevering kind of success! Christ’s witness will be heard- His light will shine- the church militant will continue the battle until the final victory is secured! That is the comfort that we need to hear! The King of Kings will not be without His loyal subjects on earth! So the church may be attacked by wolves from without and within- but Christ will protect His flock.

**III. The Holiness of the Church**

Now we come to our last point- what do the members of the church look like? Since we have seen that the color of their skin and the language that they speak is not what describes them – what does the Bible reveal concerning their DNA? Well, the DNA of a member of Christ’s church is this- holiness! I believe a holy, catholic church! Holiness is the mark of all of God’s people. As we read in Eph. 2:18- we all have access in the one Spirit to the Father. Saints and members of the household of God. Being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Here we find various aspects of the Spirit’s work. The Spirit anoints us- consecrates us and sets us apart for holy service. By the Spirit, God dwells with us- and we are being prepared for the presence of God. We are also sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption as Eph. 4 puts it. So the Spirit anoints, consecrates, sanctifies and sets us apart. Added to this, the Spirit calls and equips us for holy living. All of this is to say that members of Christ’s church are holy and they are called to be holy. Holiness is our DNA- our identity- and it is our calling- our life’s calling. We are to grow in grace and knowledge of the truth. As Heb. 12 puts it- we are to strive for peace and for the holiness- without which no one will see the Lord. So those who are members of Christ and belong to this sacred assembly will be dedicated to growing in holiness. A steadfast faith and repentance- a hatred of sin and a desire for obedience. That is the shared identity of God’s people one earth. As our article states, the church is a holy congregation- sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. As Eph. 4 applies- we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one faith and one Lord- One God and Father- One body and one Spirit. As the people of God- we are to be known in this world- made visible because of our holy lives.

To conclude, the church is not an organization of man. The building and preserving of the church is not a feat of man’s hand. No man could build a sacred assembly like this! The church on earth is a gift of Christ- but joining it is also an obligation meaning that we are duty bound to join the local church if we are a member of Christ’s true church as we will see next week Lord willing. Jesus Christ gathers His church out of this world. The church is the body of Christ, the sacred assembly of the saint, a spiritual temple, and a kingdom of priest. May we all find our place in the holy, catholic church of Jesus Christ!