



Dear Fellow Eagles,

I hope that all is going well with you and your family, and that you will be blessed and encouraged by this latest email.

Jesus said very little about 'church' during His time on earth, other than to talk about it in reference to settling disputes, and to state that 'on this rock He would build His church', after Peter had declared Him to be the 'Christ, Son of the Living God' [Matthew 16:13-20; 18:17].

Church history (and many present day expressions) makes us squirm with embarrassment, filled as they are with the most abhorrent behaviour in Jesus' name. If we look at church history in the light of Jesus' statement, we might think He hasn't got very far in two thousand years! But what if the church Jesus is building is not the one that we see?

Traditionally, the rock on which Jesus would build the church was interpreted to mean the apostle Peter, as *petros* (m) means a piece of rock in Greek, or his alternative name, *Cephas*, means a stone.

However, a different Greek word for the rock which would be the foundation of the church is used (*petra* (f)), which has the sense of a mass of rock, and can reasonably be assumed to be Christ Himself, as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:4 (using the same word).

It seems to me, that the key focus in this story was not the disciple, but the revelation of Jesus—the Christ and Son of God. It was that revelation which confirmed Simon (a reed, waving in the wind) as Peter (the little rock). And it's that revelation, rather than a person, on which Jesus' *ecclesia* would be built.

What if we are not waiting for a new, better expression of church? What if He has been steadily building the church of His choice, of people from every tribe and tongue, and every denomination and stream throughout the centuries? And what if the structure of church life, the buildings, services, traditions and programmes aren't what's really important? What if the foundation of the church Jesus is building, is based not on doctrines or ministries, but on a dynamic revelation of the Christ?

And what if it is the relationships which are built on that revelation, which really count?

The Bible doesn't tell us much at all about the forms and functions of church-life, or any of the other things we commonly hold essential. However, it says a great deal about relationships—our relationship with God, our relationships with other Christians—and our relationships with the

outside world. Jesus came first of all to restore our connection to the Father, elevating us to become beloved children of God. Then He came to take down the dividing wall between people, in order that we could experience the loving community shared by the Godhead [Ephesians 2:11-18].

When we look at Jesus' life, we see amidst the busyness of ministering to the crowds, He often withdrew to spend quality time with His twelve disciples (who, interestingly, were appointed first of all to be with Him [Mark 3:14]), and was also frequently found in more intimate groups. Mary, Martha and Lazarus had no apparent 'ministry' before or after the resurrection; but we do get the feeling their home was a place where Jesus could kick off His shoes and relax with friends.

We desperately need real relationships; people with whom we can share our deepest selves; people who will love us, support us and pray for us; people who will walk with us through difficulties, and extend forgiveness to us when we fall; people with whom we can laugh and have fun. (And we need people whom we can love and serve similarly.) Friends we can do life with. This kind of fellowship is known as koinonia in Scripture.

Sadly, 'fellowship' has so often been squashed into coffee-time after a service, and the committed can be so busy on church programmes that they haven't space for anything meaningful. It is time for koinonia to be reclaimed.

Koinonia doesn't need large numbers; in fact, there is a definite limit to the amount of people we can intimately connect with. But when we gather with 'two or three', or six or seven, ten or twelve, then Jesus is in the midst [Matthew 18:20]. And where Jesus is, healing, grace, restoration and hope flow.

And this is church—founded on the revelation of Jesus. Whenever we gather with other believers, whether we eat together, meet for coffee or a walk, have a lively discussion, share Scriptures, use the gifts of the Spirit, have fun, share a practical project, pray or break bread—this is church, with Jesus in the midst.

If you haven't got a Christian family and/or friends to 'do life' with, I urge you to ask the Lord to supply your need. And if you already have these relationships in place, then I encourage you to raise your expectation of what can occur when you gather in Jesus' name. It is our experience that His grace and mercy flows, and that the most unlikely of settings can become holy ground. In addition, this most basic expression of church cuts across barriers; we can fellowship with people who attend traditional-style churches, or no church at all, with people from different backgrounds, experiences and insights—and even courtesy of the internet, different countries—and have our lives enriched.

My husband and I have learned over the last year, having been in lock-down (in our particular area) for 9 months of it, that we can still fellowship with our friends and family, by the way of Zoom. We can still break bread, laugh, pray, discuss, study and share together. It may not be perfect, but it is still a blessing.

As lockdown eases in the UK, we are allowed to have people in our gardens again. Oh the joy, yesterday, of having dear friends, on a sunny, but very chilly evening, resplendent in blankets round the fire pit; talking face to face and breaking bread. And yes, the Lord was present.

God bless you in your relationships this week.

*Kate W @ Rhythms of Grace*

PS I do hope you are finding these emails helpful—do let me know! And if you have a particular concern you would like me to address, please get in touch, and I'll give it a shot.