

Date: October 5, 2025 (Pentecost 17)

1. Texts: Lamentations 1:1-6; Ps. 137; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10.
2. Subject: ecclesiology.
3. Topic: the Church as necessity.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "There are no Lone Rangers in the Church."

NO LONE RANGERS

St. Timothy inherited his faith from his grandmother and mother. His fundamental community shaped his faith and prepared the way for St. Paul's influence.

This reminds us of Jesus and his disciples. From the very beginning Jesus collected people around him. He recruited first 12 disciples and then 70 more. He ultimately had about 200 disciples. They travelled with him. They learned from him. They supported one another. Jesus created a fundamental community of the faithful.

That's the way he intended the Church to be. It was the way St. Paul recognized.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?¹

The early Church understood the impact and value of community. They recognized the fundamental necessity of the Church's existence.

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-30.

Today, we've lost much of that sense. Two important shifts have occurred.

The one shift is directed at the Church from outside. Society thinks of the Church as just an institution, a form of government for Christians. The Church is viewed as a legal body trying to influence people so that the Church might get their money. The more accepting people see the Church as just a charity, similar to the Cancer Society. Or they might see the Church as a service club like the Masons or Rotarians. But for many people the Church is just an institution, likely with impure motives and sketchy practices. This shift in understanding has been imposed on us by the outside world.

The other shift is internal. Due to the influence of Protestant denominations such as the Baptist Conventions and the Pentecostal Assemblies, the Christian faith is interpreted largely in individualistic terms. Faith is a personal and individual life-changing relationship. It has become a matter of personal choice that links the believer to God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many disciples view the Church and its activities as a nice addition to their spiritual practices. But the Church is not seen as essential to the faith. For many, the faith is first of all and primarily a vertical relationship with God. The horizontal connections amongst believers is often of lesser value, an optional consideration.

The testimony of the New Testament is clear: the Church as the Body of Christ and the Whole People of God is part of the fundamental reality of our faith. Belonging to God and belonging with other believers is inherent in the faith. Involvement with others in following the will of God is as important as surrendering to God. Ministering inside and with the Church is not a leisure opportunity or option. It is inherent and fundamental to our existence as Christians.

There are no "Lone Rangers" in the Church of Christ. Our common faith, sealed through our baptisms, makes us one family in Christ. Through thick and thin, in sickness and in health, we are in this cooperative relationship with God together.

I think it important to recapture some of the New Testament's understanding. The Church is no charity, club or government. It is not an option

equal to playing hockey or collecting bottles for a fundraiser. The Church is the body of Christ through which he shares his salvation with the world.

Let's start by remembering those in our families who have influenced and maybe guided our faith. As St. Paul praised Lois and Eunice for the faith of Timothy, let's take a few moments to praise those who have supported our own growth in the gospel. **[Wait.]**

Fueled by their examples, let's make a commitment to sharing our faith journeys with one another. We could commit ourselves to making our coffee time chatter about what we've learned through the Spirit in the past week. If we're part of a Bible Study, we can make sure that at least some part of our discussion starts with the phrase, "I heard God's still, small voice this week." We can ask another disciple for some help and support. All it needs is a commitment and then the courage to act on that commitment.

Lastly, we need to take the family of God out into our neighbourhoods and towns. Yes, this can be risky. We may be confronted with a long list of the evils the Church has committed. But here's the secret: never try to defend the wrongs of the past. They were wrong. Crimes are crimes. Don't say, "Yes, but..." Just admit to their existence and say, "We're trying to address those wrongs. Can you help us move ahead?"

But the important thing is to make that familial relationship with God in the Church visible to others. Faith in God must always mean a faith relationship with others. God calls us to fellowship with one another, so that we don't have to make our faith journey alone. As God fuels the relationship with himself, he also connects us to other disciples. Such a communion is not optional—it is essential to our Christian identity. It is essential to our very creation.

AMEN.