2000 years ago Jesus made an historic announcement when he said, “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” (Matthew 16:18)

He is building his church; he continues to build his church and nothing—absolutely nothing can stand in his way. He started as a 30-yr-old Jewish carpenter who had grown up in a poor rural town, the son of a teenage mom and an adoptive blue-collar dad.

He spent three years training twelve guys and then after a brutal death and a miraculous resurrection gathered approximately 120 men and women and sent them out in the power of his Holy Spirit to spread his message God’s love and forgiveness throughout the world.

The church of Jesus Christ now 2000 years old has survived relentless attacks of wicked persecution from kings and dictators, armies and false religions; and even Satan himself has not been able to impede its advance.

They have bombed our buildings, they have burned our Bibles they beaten and murdered our leaders, but the church marches onward.

It is the largest association or grouping or categorization of people in the world. We are larger than China. We are 68% larger than Islam, the 2nd largest religious group and 246% larger than Hinduism, the 3rd largest.

One out of every three people on the planet claims to be a Christian and we are adding 25 million new adherents annually – it’s like adding the pop. of Australia every yr.

The church is the only thing that’s going to last for eternity. Nothing else on this planet or in this universe is going to last for eternity. Scientists now tell us that there was a beginning to the universe and there will be an end one day. The universe is winding down. We know that.

The Bible says that one day God’s going to start all over with a new heaven and a new earth and a new universe. But the only thing that’s going to go on from this one, to the next, is God’s family. That’s the church. That’s you and me – people who have put our faith in Jesus Christ. The church is going to last forever.
So what is the church? What is this 2000 year old, world-wide, always advancing, ever growing spiritual organism? The Bible has a number of descriptions.

1 Corinthians 12:13 “Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ’s body by one Spirit.”

The Bible uses several descriptive words for a church. In this verse Paul calls it a body; a body of people—some are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free.

He uses the body analogy because a body has many parts and it represents how different each individual is, yet we are bonded together in one unit.

Paul also calls the church a bride—the bride of Christ. In John 21:23 it’s called a community of believers. We like this word. When we changed our name we chose to use it.

This morning I want to point out six critical components of authentic community

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNITY

1ST – ATTENDING, NOT NEGLECTING

Hebrews 10:25 “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do.”

In Genesis 2:18 God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” That verse was a reference to marriage but it reveals an important truth about God’s creation – people are social beings. We are designed for community.

One woman came up after a church service and admitted that she was one of those who feels isolated in a crowd. She didn’t like it, but she was haunted by two fears.

First that no one would speak to her, and the second, that some one would speak to her and she would have to respond; a double dilemma.

If you go to a restaurant in the south you may notice that every breakfast option is served with grits. A Yankee visiting the South stopped his waitress and asked half kidding, “What exactly is a grit anyway?”

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“Honey, don’t you know nothing. They’s no such thing as a grit. It’s grits. They don’t come by ‘emselves.”

After the second chapter of Genesis, that’s true about human beings, too. We’re not meant to be alone. Like grits, we’re meant to be in community.

In the OT the Hebrew word for God is “Elohim”. But there is something a bit strange about that word. The "im” ending in Hebrew indicates plural.

Even God is not alone. The Bible reveals God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus in the NT, when sending out his disciples, never sent them out alone. He always sent them out in twos.
Now it is true that everyone becomes a Christian by themselves. We don’t become a Christian with our parents, or with our children, or with our husband or wife. We each individually come to God, recognizing our own personal sin and need of a Savior.

That relationship with God is established in the solitude of our own heart. But, the moment that you turn from your sin and turn to Jesus Christ, you are born into the family of God, you are brought into the community of faith, you are baptized into the body of Christ.

The family of God, the community of faith, the body of Christ; the family, the community, the body – these are all descriptive metaphors of the same thing – the church of Jesus Christ.

We don’t come to Christ as a family or a couple. We must come by ourselves – it’s an individual decision. But...though we come to Christ as an individual, we never walk away alone.

There is no such thing as a grit. It’s grits. You are now part of a body, a family, a community of believers, followers of Christ.

The word used in the NT for baptize means to immerse, to dip under. The word was used in extra-biblical literature to die a garment. You immerse the garment in a pot of die solution to change its color. The NT ritual of baptism was an illustration that we have been changed.

Though different churches today use different modes of baptism, there is little argument among Bible scholars that baptism by immersion was the way it was done in the NT.

The baptism by the Spirit mentioned in the above verse is invisible. No one can really see that except Christ. That’s why Jesus asked us to be baptized in water, as a visible testimony of our commitment to Christ. Baptism in water doesn’t make you a Christian. It just shows that you are one.
If you have not yet been baptized as a believer, demonstrating your personal decision to follow Christ, I urge you to consider Christ’s command to be baptized, showing that you are indeed part of his eternal family. Baptism is referenced more than 100 times in the NT. Too many times to be considered unimportant. You can sign up on your response card this morning.

The Church is community. You can’t do church by yourself.

Now by the time the average American is 65 years old, they will have spent 7 years of their life watching TV. If they are a Christian they may have spent ½ year in church if they attend weekly.

In California, we’re not averaging half that.

Most of us here aren’t planning to commit adultery. We would never consider murdering someone. Yet we will break the fourth commandment week after week.

Almost any excuse is sufficient to keep us away from church. In 1610 lawmakers in the state of Virginia prescribed the death penalty to anyone who missed church three Sundays in a row.

In 1981 the movie Chariots of Fire won 4 Academy Awards including best picture. It was the true story of Eric Liddle, an Olympic runner got the attention of the world when he refused to compete on Sunday.

Instead, he went to church. His commitment to the church, the body of Christ, to putting God first on the first day of the week, was more important to him than competing in the Olympic games.

How many of us love God’s church that much? Let me challenge you, when you go out of town on vacation, don’t take a vacation from God and his family, find a church to attend. That’s what Christians do. There are few places in the world where it would really be inconvenient. When there is a soccer game, go to church first or after, but don’t train your children to put God second. We need to make a commitment to be there, and not neglect meeting together.

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} component of community is

2\textsuperscript{nd} – **COMPASSION, NOT COMPETITION.**
Psalm 145:9 “The LORD is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation.”

God is a God of compassion and if we are going to be God’s community, the church needs to be a place of compassion, not competition. Now I realize that competition in sports and even in business will sometimes bring out the best in us. But in the church, we need to be known for our compassion.

An excellent illustration, though some of you have heard it, it bears repeating. A man was visiting the school where his son attended. The 4th grade teacher was organizing a game call the balloon stomp. Some of you may have played this. The way it works is, every student has a balloon tied to his or her leg.

The object of the game is to try to stomp on everybody else’s balloon while protecting your own. Whoever has their balloon still in tack when everyone else’s has been exploded, is the winner.

I suppose the idea is to prepare the children to compete in the real world. It is obviously kind of ruthless, survival of the fittest; a very Darwinian grammar school game. Not great for building community, especially for 10 year old kids.

So the teacher blows the whistle and the game begins. It’s dog eat dog. Some kids are aggressively stomping everything they can get a foot on – balloons, feet, legs. Other kids are just focused on survival. They retreat to the corners of the room, trying to protect themselves and their balloon.

Finally, however, all the balloons are popped except one, and that kids the winner. The rules are simple. If you win, I loose. For me to win, you have to loose. Every man, or in this case, kid for himself.

Now the next thing that happened was quite disturbing. Another class of children were brought into the room. This class also was briefed on the rules and balloons were tied to their legs. But, the disturbing thing was, this was a class of mentally challenged students.

The man telling the story said he suddenly began to get a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He saw these kids and thought, this is not good. This is not the way their world ought to work. But, the whistle blew.

These kids really didn’t have much of a clue what they were supposed to do. The explanation had been very brief. About the only thing they understood was that balloons were supposed to be popped. So they began popping balloons. Only they didn’t play the game the same way as the previous class.

Instead of protecting their own balloons and chasing everybody else’s, they began going around intentionally helping each other pop their own balloons.
One little girl bent down and held her balloon with her two hand so another student could pop it, then she smiled him. Then he held his balloon so she could pop it and he smile a congratulatory smile at her.

All over the room these kids helped each other, until every balloon was popped. And when the last balloon burst they all applauded and cheered. Together they got the job done. No one was left out. Nobody lost. Everybody won.

Now the question, if you apply this illustration to the church, which way should we play the game? Which way would God want us to play the game? Competing with each other or helping each other??

If we’re going to do church, then we do it with compassion, not competition. It’s not a matter of who get there first, who’s the last one standing, or who accumulates the most trophies. Rather it’s a matter of making sure that everybody wins. That nobody is left out.

3rd – **EMBRACING, NOT EXCLUDING.**

Jesus tells a story in Lk 15, the story of the prodigal son. The son had insolently demanded that his father give him his portion of his inheritance (most of the time they wait for our parents to die).

Then the kid went off and foolishly wasted it all in self-indulgent living. But when his funds ran out, he found himself starving to death. So he decides to return home and throw himself on the mercy of his father.

Luke 15:20 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him.”

Then he turned to his servants and said, “Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.” Luke 15:22-24

The father did far more than forgive the son. He embraced him, included him, threw a party for him. But there is also something else Jesus wanted us to notice in the story.

The text says, the older son had been in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your
father has killed the calf we had been fattening. We are celebrating because of his safe return.

The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he responded, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do anything you told me to.

And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!?

His father said to him, ‘Look, my dear son, you have always been here, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!

Do you see what’s going on? The older brother wants to exclude not include. He’s thinking, “I’m better than that jerk. I deserve more.” Too often in churches we don’t know how to include.

When God brings alcoholics, criminals, liars, cheaters, and adulterers into our church, we need to learn how to include them, not exclude them.

How many people around us are just longing to be included?? A passenger on a cruise ship spotted a bearded man on a small island. The bearded man was shouting and desperately waving his arms in the air. The passenger went to the ship's captain and asked, "Who is that man?" The captain replied, "Beats me, but every year when we sail past, he goes completely nuts."

Doing church in community means reaching out, embracing others and including them. We had a man who was an alcoholic attend this church. It was extremely difficult for him because he said he was comparing his insides to everyone else’s outsides.

I know it feels a little awkward sometimes when we stand up and welcome each other at the beginning of our services, but it is a great way to practice reaching out and including everyone around us. Look around, see the person by themselves.

4TH – ACCEPTING, NOT JUDGING.

Matthew 7:1 (NKJV) “Judge not, that you be not judged.”
Romans 15:7 “So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.”
A church marquis beautifully explained this principle when it read, “The church is the one place where you aren’t too bad to come in, not too good to stay out.”

The Bible is not suggesting that we condone everything that people do, but rather that we recognize that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness.

This is an area where we in the church need to do some serious work. Religious people are notorious for being judgmental. We are better known for what we are against than what we are for.

Last week I spoke about the issues that are important to God in the coming election. The primary problem I have it speaking that way is that too often people feel excluded; judged.

We have to help them realize that God’s laws are not there to inhibit or hinder the enjoyment of life, but rather to insure it. Jesus said, “I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.” John 10:10

Homosexuals don’t go to hell because they are homosexuals. If they go to hell it’s because they refused to accept the love and forgiveness that Jesus offers.

It was the religious elite in Jesus’ day who were the hypocrites, judging everyone else. This tendency toward judging others often comes from pride; the pride of thinking that we are better than everyone else. We’re not better; we’re just forgiven.

5TH – SHARING, NOT WITHHOLDING.

Acts 2:44-45 “And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need.”

Christians are ___% more likely to give to needs around them that the average person. They are ___% more likely to volunteer to serve.

But that’s not all we share. According to Christianity Today this month, 80% of regular church attendees believe they have a responsibility to share their faith with non-Christians.

Many people were shocked by the catastrophe on Mount Everest in May 1996 in which a dozen mountaineers perished. One of the most disturbing stories was of two climbers who in their summit bid bypassed three injured, starving, and freezing climbers.
The climbers had sufficient provisions to render aid to the stranded climbers, but they did not want to jeopardize their ascent by stopping to assist them. As a result, all three climbers died.

Later, when asked why they had not stopped to help, one of the climbers said, "We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters [26,000 feet] is not a place where people can afford morality."

The actions of the two climbers and the statement attempting to justify what they did, was considered by many, a callous and contemptible example of selfishness.

The OT book of Ezekiel affords us a great illustration of what God expects from us in the church today. God says to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for Israel. Whenever you receive a message from me, pass it on to the people immediately.” Ezekiel 3:17

In the first three chapters of his book, Ezekiel describes his call to ministry. This was a time of hard-hearted stubbornness, when people refused to listen, not unlike today. But God was sending Ezekiel to deliver his message.

When Ezekiel received the message, it was sweet as honey and God told him to let the word sink deep into his own heart first, then to go to the people and deliver God’s message. He was to be like a watchman on the wall and he would be held accountable. Watchmen who failed to warn the people when danger was coming were required to pay with their lives.

We too, have been given a life and death message. But his words and message are not just meant for us. We need to look for opportunities to pass them on. His words can be sweet as honey to us, but we will be held accountable to share them.

6TH – BUILDING UP, NOT TEARING DOWN.

Daryl Lundberg, Joel Morris and I attended a conference this week in Irvine, Ca. It was called Resurgence. Keynote speakers were

Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA. He’s the author of The Purpose Driven Life, with over 30 million copies sold worldwide.

Greg Laurie is the senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, CA and founder of Harvest Crusades, which have ministered to 4,405,000 people
Lecrae Moore whose recent hip-hop album *Rehab*, reached No. 3 on the Top 10 albums chart on iTunes

Nick Vujicic was born with neither arms nor legs. Today, God uses Nick’s story of courage and perseverance to touch lives and bring the hope of Jesus Christ to people across the globe.

Miles McPherson, is the senior pastor of the Rock Church in San Diego, one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States, and author of *Do Somthing! Make Your Life Count*.

James MacDonald is the founding pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, which has grown to 13,000 people each weekend, meeting in six locations in Illinois.

Craig Groeschel is the senior pastor for LifeChurch.tv – a multisite church with locations in five states all linked by Sunday morning TV broadcast.

Mark Driscoll is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, the church that sponsored the entire event.

There were probably 3000 pastors and church leaders attending. One of the observations that Daryl made was how young all the Christian leaders were. The vast majority of these pastors and church leaders were in their 20’s and 30’s.

Apart from the speakers, we were the oldest ones there. And you think our music is loud. After the first session I sat outside until the music was done. I could hear it just fine, outside.
But I couldn’t have been more encouraged about what I saw. These were the next generation leaders of the Church. They were bright, intelligent, excited, zealous, and enthusiastic. The church of Jesus Christ is not slowing down.

Some of the speakers were from my generation and they were passing on the wisdom of their years to these new church leaders.

Everyone in this room is part of God’s church and we need to leave our mark. We need to pass the baton.

Luke 8:15 says, "But the good soil represents honest, good hearted people who hear God’s message, cling to it and steadily produce a huge harvest."

In the parable of the soils Jesus indicates four different responses to his message. The hard soil represents those who were preconditioned to resist his message. Hard soil has been trampled on and beaten down.

The problem is not the farmer or the quality of the seed. It represents hearts that has been hurt, abused, or emotionally damaged and has become suspicious and even bitter in their resistance to the Good News.

The rocky soil has been filled with stones of doubts and intellectual questions. The truth is received with curiosity but encounters stubborn resistance and arguments.

The thorny soil represents hearts that are busy and distracted by prior commitments and competing desires. The three common barriers are either emotional, intellectual or the congestion of distractions.

There is good soil however, and it is humble, open and full of faith. We must look for good soil. Though the ratio of suitable soil types is 1 of 4 in the parable, there is plenty of good soil and fields are white for harvest. That’s where we should invest our efforts.

Eph 4:29 (NIV) “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

We have a chance to build up the body of Christ. Three years ago we launched in intentional discipleship initiative. And though it’s only been three years, we have already seen some remarkable results.

Part of our plan this year was to bring on to our campus the author of the book we have been using as our discipleship curriculum. Dr. Greg Ogden will be with us this Wednesday.
Open your Worship Program and get the Discipleship brochure. The handoff is the most important part of a relay race. The church is running a race.

We here at Camarillo Community have always seen our mission as reaching the world, not just our own congregation and community. We don’t criticize other church or tear others down. Instead we try to help build them up as well.

That’s why we sent out hundreds of these brochures to churches all over southern California. The events of the day: CMA lunch, ID participants Q&A, Eat n Run book signing, Evening Seminar 7-8:30.

Please pray and come.