



SERMON RECAP

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

The Church: the home of God's love

Series: Finding Faith for the Skeptic.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, John 13:34-35

For the last few weeks we have been talking about “finding faith for the skeptic,” and I realize that perhaps the greatest cause of skepticism about being a Christian is, well, other Christians. “The Church” is not perfect. There is an apocryphal quote by Mahatma Gandhi: “Your Christ I like, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” There is no evidence that Gandhi ever said or wrote this, but its sentiment rings true to so many because of the ways that the Church has acted in the past.

The Church has justified dehumanizing slavery, exploitative colonialism, patriarchal misogyny, and homophobic exclusion. Much harm has been done by the church, and it has largely affected the very people that we have been called to protect. The prophets railed against the hypocrisy of those who yielded political and religious power while doing harm to orphans, widows, and alien residents. So when we talk about skepticism and the church, it is important to take this pain into account. Church trauma is real.

We must face the harm the Church has done, even while cherishing what it has stood for—and what it still might become. While some within the Church have resisted justice and actively worked to keep people in oppression, it has also been the cradle of liberative movements from abolition to civil rights. With all of its faults, the Church remains a place of community, healing and refuge for many.

Jesus told us that people will know our faith by the way we love one another. The Church is supposed to be a place of love, generosity, community, and grace. Even skeptics realize the need for community in our world. Isolation is epidemic in our culture, and church should be a healing balm for this sickness.

Churches, especially churches like Two Rivers Church, can still play an important role in society. While many skeptics reject or dismiss the church, one abstract from a Harvard study that examined other studies states:

“Participation in religious services is associated with numerous aspects of human flourishing, including happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships. Evidence... comes from rigorous longitudinal study designs with extensive confounding control. The associations with flourishing are much stronger for communal religious participation than for spiritual-religious identity or for private practices.”
(<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5665144/>)

Today we immerse eight young people into the water of baptism so that they may die to a world of scarcity, fear, and isolation and rise into a community of love and abundance. You are called to remember your baptism and remember the three vows that are shared each time we do this:

1. People are harmed by evil in the world. Evil is real, systemic, and pervasive.
2. We are called to resist evil and defend those who are harmed by it.
3. More, we are called by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do this resistance.

Look at these eight young people. Consider their families of origin, the incredible stories of how they arrived at this moment. Look around the congregation and see people who have been serving diligently for decades, retirees who have found us later in life, college students who have found welcome and thoughtful conversation, immigrants who were received with joy, young people stepping into their faith, LGBTQ people who are not harangued to change who they were created to be, faithful skeptics, thoughtful wonderers, and curious visitors.

There are about 75 people here today, and in this room is an incredible wealth of knowledge, talent, and wisdom. Our origins wrap around the globe and are anchored deep in the soil of Rock Island. We are a people of faith enjoying the many “aspects of human flourishing” together.

We are not a perfect collection of saints, and you are certainly not led by a perfect pastor. We are a group of people that comes together to confess our sins and celebrate our triumphs. We sing praise to God, and ask questions about life and faith. We learn from the Word of God faithfully proclaimed and participate in the sacraments that connect us to the divine. We are a church that even a skeptic can find faith in. It is a church worth sharing.