

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“WHY CHURCH? REASON ONE: COMMUNITY”
LUKE 15:1-10
September 12, 2010
9 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

Some people prefer spending their Sunday mornings fishing, golfing, going out for a leisurely breakfast or even sleeping in instead of attending church. They argue **“I don’t need to go to church because I can worship God by myself.”**

Well it is true that one can worship God alone, but most people who make that argument don’t actually spend that time worshiping. When they’re climbing a mountain, walking on a golf course, sitting by a stream or lying home in bed, chances are pretty good they aren’t thinking about God at all. And even if they are, take my word for it, it isn’t quite the same.

As we said last week, there is a cost for discipleship. And of course, these other activities place fewer demands on you than coming to church. No one will pass offering plates among Sunday morning golfers. No one will bother Sunday morning joggers with pesky questions about how they’ll address the world’s hunger problem. And no one will tell Sunday morning fishermen that they must repent and believe the gospel.

In fact, every pastoral argument I can advance about why you should attend church has validity. But I must admit that for some, such arguments probably appear to have an undertone of either desperation or ambition. After all, we who are pastors have a vested interest in not only the survival of the churches we serve but also their growth, so we get worried when attendance drops off. In that case — and that is the case in many places across America today — such arguments about why people should attend church can sound self-serving. So, Why Church?

As we move into our centennial year, that will be the focus of our theme for worship. Therefore this morning we begin a series on **Why Church?** And today we begin with **Reason One: Community.**

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knew that sheep do best when they're with other sheep. So as we begin this new church year, vacations are over, school is back in session and our church programming is getting underway. This is the most opportune time for us to examine why we gather in this place as a church. I pray that you will make it your business to be here each Sunday over the course of this series as we attempt to answer the question "**Why do we do church, anyway?**"

Here's the schedule: today we start with reason one for church: **Community**. Next Sunday we will talk about reason two: **Real People**. Then on September 26th we will examine reason three: **Money Matters**. And finally, we will close out the series on World Community Sunday with reason four: **Mentors**.

We do church because we need community

Why do we do church? Community! We all benefit from participation in the life of the church here at Park Hill. Our faith community provides instruction, support, feedback and accountability. It brings order to our lives. Attending worship is one of the most important ways of putting the events of our lives in helpful perspective. Community rules! Community rocks!

When I went to visit Ida Daniel in the hospital, she talked about how important and helpful this community of faith is to her journey toward healing. Visiting with Paul and Cleone Smith, they shared how important the community here at Park Hill is for their journey toward wholeness. Web and Elaine Franklin called from Arizona to remind us that there is no place like Park Hill.

So we do church because it satisfies our need for community — and a faith community at that.

Because God says so?

Some people attend church because they believe to do so, pleases God. Well I can't argue with that, but I would add that there is a faith benefit for anyone who attends worship. After all, we do come here to worship. And the One whom we worship encounters us when we do come. But more importantly, the One whom

we worship is concerned when we do not come. That's why when I received emails from members about the music being uninspiring on one Sunday morning, I immediately let them know that it had been noted, but more importantly, it would be getting better. After all, they came to worship!

According to the text this morning, the Good Shepherd is concerned about the one sheep that is missing from the fold, from worship; absent from this community. The Gospel Choir is calling members who are missing from the choir because they are concerned about their need for community. The Good Shepherd looks for sheep who wander off. He finds them and brings them back to the flock. In the context of our worship experience we must make sure that we do not give members any cause to wander off. We must be at our best every Sunday!

It is in the life of the congregation where you are nurtured and where God can work with you. It is here where we become community; a place of safety, sustenance and nurture. Why church? Because this is where the community of faith can connect you with the ***"HOLY"***.

**I love Thy church, O God.
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And written on Thy hand.**

**For her my tears shall fall
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.**

Perhaps you too have found this church to be a very special place. If you want to connect with a community where you will be nurtured in the love of God, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.