* **APOSTLES CREED**
* **SERIES SLIDE**
* In 1995, a little independent movie came out in limited release that I’m willing to bet that you have never seen or heard of.
* I certainly hadn’t until a couple of months ago.
* The name of the movie is SAFE. It only made about half a million dollars at the Box Office, but it won a good deal of independent movie awards.
* In fact, the Village Voice named SAFE the best film of the decade for the 1990s.
* So I watched it. And WHOA. It was…something.
* It wasn’t a horror movie, but it was deeply haunting.
* It was made in 1995, but it aged REALLY well. In some ways, SAFE predicted not only where we are today in our culture, but also still gives an eerie prediction as to where we are headed.
* Let me explain.
* SAFE is the story of Carol, an upper class housewife in the San Fernando Valley in California in the late 1980s.
* She has a wealthy husband and a son, and a large beautiful house. She is attractive, surrounded by friends, and spends her days working out at the gym, shopping for furniture, digging around in her garden, and getting her hair done and nails manicured at the salon.
* She has a housemaid and she doesn’t even sweat when she works out.
* Yet still, even in her utopia, you can tell there is a kind of unhappiness. There is an emotional distance between her and her husband.
* Her friendships are very superficial.
* But she seems content…enough.
* Until she has a severe allergic reaction to some dump truck exhaust on the highway. Then she gets a perm…and has a nose bleed. She hyperventilates at a friend’s baby shower. Her skin starts breaking out in rashes and she has debilitating headaches.
* Doctor after doctor tell her that there is no medical explanation. They tell her to change her diet, they test her for allergies, but eventually tell her the whole thing is in her head…and she should see a psychiatrist.
* To get the bottom of her mysterious illness, she attends a seminar about toxins, chemicals, and stress. There, she has what amounts to a conversion experience. She is born-again into the community that believes that are allergic to the 20th century.
* At the seminar, she is encouraged to find her “safe place”, a room in her home that is free from both the contaminants of modern chemicals and toxins and free from stressful thoughts.
* Since her conditions don’t improve, she decides to relocate to the New Mexico Desert to a secluded “healing community”. Sort of like a long-term care facility for people with 20th century disease…but more like a cult.
* The leader of the commune is an HIV-positive guru who, puts the bulk of the blame for the effects of the 20th century disease NOT on the chemicals and toxins in the air…but on his followers. They don’t think positively enough. They don’t love themselves enough. At one point, he tells them that the stopped reading the newspaper and watching the news, because it brought too many negative feelings.
* They even gather every evening for what look a lot like church services.
* They sing, chant, and have a little sermon from the guru. They participate in a shared meal together, and welcome “new converts”
* In one of these sermons, the guru says, “Transformation is happening. I can see it in your eyes. But why? **Because we have left the judgmental behind**.”
* At that point, you really start to wonder. What exactly is the cause for these people’s ailments? Is it coming from the outside…or the inside?
* Here’s the chant they say every evening at their gatherings. Sort of their own version of a Creed.
* **We are one with the power that created us.**
* **We are safe.**
* **And all is well with our world.**
* In a later scene, the guru’s wife, Claire finds Carol crying. Having a breakdown.
* So she gives her “testimony”.
* She says “I used to be like you, when we first moved here. So, I got a secluded safe room. And I stayed in there all day long, for a month. And every hour of every day, I’d stare into a mirror and say, “Claire, I love you. I really love you.
* “At the end of the month…I could finally leave my room and before you know it. I was walking again.”
* **“It really was a gift. Everything in the material world got taken away. And all that was left was me.”- Claire, *Safe***
* Carol who isn’t getting any better, decides to move into a safe room. She’s told, “You’ll be safe, as long as no one else steps inside with you.”
* It's this igloo type structure made of porcelain. With a single bed and no windows. Just a mirror. Completely cut off from anyone else. You can’t see the world from inside…but you have a great view of yourself.
* She says goodbye to her husband and son who have come to help her move in, and she goes inside and seals the door.
* In the final haunting scene, she sits on the edge of the bed with her oxygen tank. Her faced washed out and marked with red lesions.
* She slowly rises approaches the mirror, and says to herself …, “I love you. I really love you.”

Roll Credits.

**Title Slide- “Lester & the Mirror: Why the Church is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Intimate, Dependent Kingdom-Family-Temple…but Its Not Safe”- Ephesians 2:11-22**

In our journey through the Apostles’ Creed, we’ve come to the two lines specifically about the church.

**“I believe in the holy catholic Church and the communion of the saints”**

And strangely, in our day, these actually might be 2 of the most difficult lines for many of you to recite. Despite the presence of statements that declare a creator God you can’t see, a miraculous conception and birth of a God-Man, a resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven…

…a lot of people actually struggle the most to say “I believe in the holy catholic Church…and the communion of saints.”

Because church is people. And people hurt us.

In fact, there is so much baggage that even comes around that word “catholic”…which in this case simply means “universal” or “at all times in all places”…but some of you hear “Catholic” as a sort of denomination. And it brings up ugly memories of childhood…of an institution…or a person…that harmed you.

Its hard to say “I believe in people that hurt me.”

In response to that, many folks have abandoned the whole institution of church. Lets get rid of the authority, lets abandon the structure. I’ll be spiritual, but not religious. I’ll worship God in nature, instead of in a building. I’ll have a private faith where only God can judge me, I don’t have to be accountable to anyone publically for something that’s between me and God.

After all, we’re all just sinners.

I have a relationship, not a religion.

I love Jesus, but you can keep the church.

Today, if you don’t already…I want you to deeply value the holy universal church…and the dirty ugly, but beautiful local communion of saints…called City Church.

…and then I want you do something about it.

Because if you keep pushing the church away to be “safe”…you will end up isolated, disconnected….and metaphorically staring into a mirror saying “I love you. I really love you.”

**Ephesians 2:11-22**

**11 So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh ​— ​called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. 12 At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. 16 He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. 17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.**

**Transition:** One of the great lies of our day is that you are better off as an autonomous individual. That ***real*** freedom is having as few commitments as possible & the individual is more important than the community.

Which is one of the reasons many of us have a problem with a church that calls us to anything more than showing up and hearing a sermon.

But…

**1) The church becomes more intimate & dependent on each other as we become more intimate & dependent on God.**

* + There is this REALLY strange character in the movie “SAFE”. His name is Lester. You never see his face. You never hear his voice. He has less than 30 seconds TOTAL of screen time.
  + But he is by far the most memorable image from the whole film.
  + You only see him from a distance. He walks around the edge of the commune…with a very disturbing sort of walk. He is completely covered from head to toe-- gloves on his hand and a ski mask over his face.
  + When Carol asks the guru about him, he says, “Lester? He’s just very afraid. To eat. To breathe.”
  + The interesting thing about Lester is the 2 times the camera shows him, he’s always looking to the center of the camp. Its almost like he wants to go in and talk to people, but he’s too afraid.
  + He’s interested in what’s happening, but all he can do is circle around the outside…covered up…SAFE.
  + Its not worth the risk to him…even though he really wants to talk to someone, laugh with someone, BE with someone.
  + He is independent. He’s safe. But he’s an outsider…and honestly, he scares everyone.
  + Some of you are like Lester with the church.
  + You want to be on the inside. You like the idea of relationships.
  + But you also want to stay safe. You don't want to risk getting hurt. You want to keep your independence.
  + This passage in Ephesians is teaching us, that as our intimacy and dependence on God grow…so does our intimacy and dependency on each other.
  + As you get closer with God, you get closer with other people…and frankly, both of those things feel pretty dangerous.
  + **V 18**
  + First, he says that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, two groups of people that normally had nothing to do with each other, now have access in ONE spirit to God the Father.
  + In other words, people who normally wouldn’t interact with each other, now have been invited to know and worship the SAME GOD an therefore, as we are drawn into GOD as the center of our lives…we also get closer to each other.
  + **V 19**
  + Then he says, “We are no longer strangers and foreigners. In other words…because Jesus is at the center of our lives, …we are now pulled closer together.
  + Look at the 3 images that Paul uses for the church…and notice the progression of the metaphors. They get more dependent and more intimate as they go.
  + First, we’re fellow citizens of a country. Which would make God our King.
  + Think about those relationships for a second.
  + A king has authority. And citizens definitely depend on a King…and can even appreciate and honor a King.
  + But there’s not much intimacy there. Even a good King doesn’t really know all his subjects…
  + And…corresponding to that…citizens, while we depend on each other for a good country…and society…your actions only *indirectly* affect me… And honestly, while we can nod and say hi and speak pleasantries…there is no obligation for citizens to go much deeper than that.
  + So the next metaphor is a household.
  + A family
  + Now, God is a Father and we are brothers and sisters.
  + A Father, is still in a position of authority, but now there is intimacy. We go further in. And now we aren’t just depending on God for a good environment…we are depending on him for food on the table, and love in our hearts.
  + And, of course, brothers and sisters are much more intimate and dependent on one another than fellow citizens. Brothers and sisters live life together. They share hurts and highs with each other. And, when push comes to shove…they are there for each other.
  + **V 20-22**
  + Then Paul says that the church is a building.
  + Not like the building we meet in…but he says that the people of God are bricks that are stacked on a cornerstone…who is Jesus…and they make up a temple.
  + And inside that building…God is now as intimate with us…and we are as dependent on him and each other as we have ever been.
  + See now, God is not just a Father outside of us… His Holy Spirit dwells not just in us as individuals…but as we together make up the church…his Spirit is running through us altogether.
  + Additionally, while a Father can give instruction from outside, Parents…especially of teenagers….or when your kids went through college…do you ever wish you could indwell your children and see what they are seeing. And talk to them. And remind them of who they really are and how important their choices are?
  + But as parents we’re limited. But not God our Father. That’s exactly what his Holy Spirit does. He goes with us… he sees what we see. He talks to us. He directs us. And man….when you become dependent on God’s Spirit…attentive to his voice...shoo…it is a beautiful, wonderful deep dependence. Is it safe?
  + Well, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And The Spirit led Jesus toward the Garden of Gethsemane where he would be arrested. And the Spirit moved Jesus to the cross, to die.
  + So is he safe? No.
  + But he’s good. Because all along the Spirit reminded Jesus that he is God’s Son…and that he would resurrect. It was the Spirit that set the joy before Jesus that lifted his eyes to his Father…and past his suffering.
  + **Oh yes, the Holy Spirit makes us more intimate and dependent on God than ever before.**
  + And think about bricks. They aren’t just there for each other on occasion, like brothers and sisters who can go to their individual rooms, no…bricks are cemented together and stacked on top of each other. The bricks of a building are as close as you can get…and each brick is dependent on two bricks under it…and supporting two bricks on top of it.
  + The picture of the church, the people of God as a temple, is the most dependent and intimate picture of a people you can possibly get.
  + It doesn’t FEEL safe…because you have to depend and open up…and be intimate. It disrupts your life…it changes your independent life goals…
  + ...but it actually keeps you from turning into Lester. Walking around the people of God, wishing you could be on the inside, but valuing the safety of your independence to much to come inside…to let others in…and to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit…inviting you to trust.
  + And it keeps you from sealing yourself off wear the only voice of love you hear…are you self-affirmations while you stare into a mirror.
  + Honestly, to me, that’s a lot scarier.
  + Look, do any of these metaphors fit in with you just showing up at church two or three times a month for inspiration? Do these images describe the kind of relationship you have with the church?
  + **Hebrews 3:12-13**
  + For example, brothers and sisters, because of their relationship and proximity, know each others flaws and sins.
  + So in Hebrews 3, we are told to encourage one another.
  + You know what that word “encourage” is in greek.
  + Its PARAKALEO.
  + It means to confront. To argue. To counsel. To Exhort.
  + Jesus called the Holy Spirit the PARACLETE.
  + In other words, as we depend on and are intimate with the Holy Spirit…God will use us to speak to, confront, and counsel our brothers and sisters to ALSO, be dependent on, and listen to the Holy Spirit.
  + We will care about whether our brothers and sisters are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
  + You know what that means? That sin is deceitful?
  + It means you can’t see it.
  + It means your sin is often hidden from you until a brother or sister points it out.
  + It means you will probably be in denial about it.
  + That doesn't feel safe, does it?
  + That is NOT the judgment free zone that the Guru in the movie said is the key to being SAFE.
  + Listen, unless you have some proximity, some lived life, and some honest conversation with brothers and sisters in the church…how can you or them possibly live this out.
  + We have to be close enough to see each others flaws. To hear confessions and be there for one another.
* **Back to 1)**
  + This is why we do community groups. And inside of that, why we have D-groups…that are walking through Scripture together and confessing sin and encouraging one another.
  + This is why we want every member of this church to understand that they are a counselor…because that Holy Spirit who is himself a counselor indwells you.
  + This cannot happen through Social Media.
  + We can’t text this in.
  + This is brick on brick, face to face, brother sister, under the Father, built on the cornerstone kind of life.
  + And anything else…honestly, just leaves us using one another…and slowly separating ourselves from each other. Just sort of helping everybody feel safe…and get you to your safe spot where you can look into a mirror and tell yourself “I love you. I really love you.”
  + Stop it, Lester. Take off your mask and gloves…and come close. You know you want to. Stop being afraid…and start being known.
* Transition: Now I want to show you 4 things, from the Scripture, that the creed picks up on…that are THE BASICS of what the church is. 4 words.
* **2) The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.**
  + Sometimes, the church just seems like a group of Jesus’ Facebook friends that occasionally show up together in person on a weekend.
  + Like people line up outside the Apple store after a iPhone is released.
  + Or people sitting in an airport lobby waiting on their flight.
  + You know, we are kind of connected by a common purpose…but those purposes are all individual. We are all going to use our phones mainly to worship ourselves…and we are all going to spread out and disconnect once we land at our destination.
  + Its like the people at the commune in SAFE. Yeah, they were all there because of a common fear…but ultimately, they were all just isolating themselves from each other to feel safe.
  + We are together…but disconnected.
  + But the church is not pews, pulpits, podcasts, or programs.
  + Its people, not steeple.
  + Its not where we meet or what we do…its who we are.
  + There is not a church of ME.
  + There is only church of US.
  + To that end…here are what makes a church distinct from all those other groups.
  + **V 14 (stop at “hostility”)**
  + First, the church is ONE.
  + In this passage, the issue Paul is addressing Jews and Gentiles who have come together…from two different worldviews…from 2 different cultures…that normally would be deeply at odds with each other, hostile toward one another, but now, because of Christ…the wall is torn down. The two have become one.
  + We have one Father, one Spirit, one baptism, one Savior, one mission, one goal, and one creed.
  + And that means, that whatever threatens to divide us…race, culture, sin, preferences, geography, sports teams, hobbies, politics…all of that is put under the Lordship of Jesus…All of those things get in the back seat…While Jesus drives us all to the same goal.
  + The things that would typically tempt us to think we are better than another person, are all crucified on the cross with Jesus.
  + That’s why the church can and should be made up of all races and cultures, all poltical parties, all economic and social classes, all ages.
  + We are one.
  + **V 21**
  + Paul says that we are a holy temple.
  + You know what holiness is?
  + I define it as Divine Attractive Otherness.
  + Its divine because holiness comes FROM God…the divine.
  + Its Attractive…because deep down its everything a human being wants.
  + Its peace. Its justice. Its beauty. Its righteousness. Its goodness. Its faithfulness. Its deep unshakeable joy.
  + And its otherness, because it's the opposite of what being DISCONNECTED from God produces.
  + Its not consumerism, its cultivation.
  + Its not keeping all my options open, its commitment and covenant and promise keeping.
  + Its not anxious and fearful, its sober-minded and hopeful
  + Its not cynical…its thankful.
  + It doesn’t PROJECT its values…it LIVES its values.
  + It doesn’t Love itself…Holiness loves God and Loves others…even when that means, and often it does mean, self-denial.
  + Listen, God gives holiness to the church to be a City on a Hill. Salt of the Earth. Light in the darkness. God makes the church holy to make a difference.
  + But to make a difference….we have to BE DIFFERENT.
  + And that doesn’t feel safe.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to give your money away to the poor.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to tithe.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to keep a bedroom open in your house for a person that needs a bed for a week, or a month, or a year.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to put away your phone and talk.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to turn the TV off and confess your sin.
  + It doesn’t feel safe to live life differently than your neighbors, to vacation less than they do, or for your kids to not play as many sports as your neighbors kids do…so that you have more time to be a family…and a church family…and you have more time to actually SEE your neighbors and be there when they are there.
  + It doesn't feel safe to be holy.
  + But its good. Its beautiful. And you won’t regret it.
  + **V 17**
  + The church is also catholic. Again this means all times and all places. Its not a reference to the Roman Catholic church. It means that any church that would confess the apostles Creed is on our team…they are not our rival.
  + I need to want the good of other churches and work with other churches.
  + We see this often undermined with “Imma go to a different church to start over”. As if pastors shouldn’t communicate and give a heads up to how to care for a person.
  + Think about doctors communicating a persons disease.
  + It also means that I need to pay attention to church history…and learn from them.
  + It means the newest books don't mean they are the best books.
  + It means that we have a lot of godly voices to listen to that have come before us…they can help us better see through the contemporary problems of our day.
  + The church is universal. She is catholic.
  + **V 20**
  + And finally, the church is apostolic
  + This has 2 parts to it.
  + The church is apostolic because we have a faith that was passed down to us by the apostles. The ones who were there and saw Jesus die and resurrect.
  + So our doctrine matters. Anything that strays from the Scripture or moves us away from the confessions in the Apostles Creed should be rejected. Because we don’t MAKE UP what we believe to fit our current sensibilities…no. We contend for the faith passed down once for all by the saints.
  + Second, we are apostolic because APOSTOLIC means we are sent.
  + The word “apostle” means “sent one”
  + So to be apostolic is to be SENT OUT. We don’t just remain safe in our comfortable commune…we take the faith once for all delivered by the saints…we take the gospel out to the world. How beautiful are the FEET of those who bring good news.
  + Remember…we aren’t HOLY for ourselves.
  + To look in the mirror and say, “I love you. I really love you.”
  + And we aren’t holy just to weird, like a bund of Lesters strangely stalking outside the camp of our neighbors.
  + No we are weird, holy, set apart, DIFFERENT…in order to MAKE a difference in the world…and in the lives of our neighbors and families.
  + **And that’s scary.**
  + **It doesn’t feel safe.**
  + Because today, The church is quickly becoming NOT the MORAL MAJORITY, but the immoral minority. We have offensive views on everything from money, to family to gender to politics to religious pluralism and sexuality.
  + Its not SAFER. Buts its beautiful. And its better.
* **Back to 2)**
  + If a church is not Intimate and dependent on God and each other…
  + …if a church is not ONE…HOLY…Catholic…and apostolic…
  + Then its not a church.
  + It's a weird commune really just teaching you to love yourself and stay safe from the big bad world outside.
* Transition: The truth is…
* **3) Without Christ, we are Lester. With Christ, we are whole.**
  + In Safe, Lester represents the person who on one hand desperately wants to be whole. To be healed.
  + But that safety comes at a price.
  + It sort of makes you this ghost…this creature that no one knows…and therefore no one really loves.
  + Lester aches to be on the inside, but he’s too afraid to take off his mask and risk. He’s too afraid to open himself up.
  + **V 12**
  + That's the way Paul describes the gentiles here before Christ died.
  + He says, they are without hope…and without God in the world.
  + Do you realize how scary the world is without God.
  + Injustices are up to you to correct.
  + Sin is up to you to forgive.
  + Disesae is up to you to heal.
  + Death is up to you, and you alone to face.
  + And in the face of death.
  + In the face of the greatest evil, looking in the mirror and repeating self-affirmations are empty and hopeless.
  + **v 13-15**
  + But Look at Christ. For us to be brought near to God and each other. He was crucified…the Scripture says… outside the camp.
  + We were made safe with God our Father..we were given the indwelling Holy Spirit, because he was stripped naked and vulnerable on a cross…where he bled and died.
  + He took our sin of self-approval…our sin of self-centeredness and isolation on himself…and died.
  + So that in his resurrection…we would not be condemned by God’s law, but made whole and complete..one holy catholic apostolic church…by his torn and resurrected flesh.
* **Back to 3)**
  + **Without Christ, you remain Lester. Always wanting into the intimacy of the church…but always outside, because you are afraid of self-denial. You are afraid if you don’t look yourself in the mirror and say “I love you…you think no one will”**
  + But that is what Christ did on the Cross.
  + That’s what his Holy Spirit whispers to you by his grace.
  + That you are a beloved child…and you have brothers and sisters that love you.
  + So now, you can stop living independently on the outside, and give yourself to this great God who gave himself for the church.
  + Jesus…in a way…believed in people who hurt him. Who killed him. Because he knew his Father…and His Father knew them.

**PRAYER CARDS**- Until Easter…daily pray in the morning before you look at your phone…and read Scripture. Spirit, today is about your presence…and loving others.

**Prayer TEAM**

* **Lords Supper Slide**