How would you guys describe the importance of like church community to your family, to you personally, and that piece of living out our faith? You know, we're called in scripture like not to do life alone. Like the faith in our life is meant to be lived out in community. So talk about like that importance for you guys personally. I don't think you can have faith or have church without community.

So like in my learning about this, I've understood communion to be, you know, when we're sitting together with people, when we are like in community, when we are having a meal with somebody, not necessarily just like a ritual on Sunday. Without the relationship, it's really nothing. Yeah, I think having people around you that can help you through good times and bad times and, you know, be there to help celebrate the birth of a child or clear a tree out of your driveway, you know, or whatever. And so I think that importance of having those people around you that are in similar life stages and are willing to kind of come alongside and build you up, and you can do the same, I think it's vital, you know, as God is working to build his church, like the big C church, What is your prayer for our church? I think my prayer would be that we continue to just strip away like the idols of what we believe church to be and just get to see people eye to eye and love them for, for who they are and where they are.

The church is doing that right now, and that's my, my prayer that we continue to just be honest and be genuine and, and get to know people.

Good morning, church.

So this morning of September 11th, 2001, I'm sure many of you remember where you were. I was in my 4th year of college. It was Tuesday morning. Tuesday mornings at Lincoln Christian College, we had chapel at 9 o'clock. I didn't have an 8 o'clock class, and so I was scrambling to get ready in the morning to be able to make it there on time.

Having no idea what was happening in the world around me. And I walked out of my dorm room and I was walking to the chapel and some friends of mine came and came up next to me and they asked if I'd heard the news. And if you maybe kind of remember during that time, Michael Jordan was trying to decide if he was gonna come out of retirement again. And so when they asked if I had heard the news, I just assumed that he had made his announcement, but then they told me what had happened and that there were 2 planes that had crashed into the World Trade Center and it seemed to be intentional. And about that time we walked into the chapel and you could just feel the heaviness in the room.

And for the next hour, students and faculty gathered together, worshiped, prayed, cried together, read scripture together. My friend Joe was sitting next to me. Joe was from Long Island. I remember him

being so concerned and worried about people that he knows and loves, wondering if they were in the city that morning. So of course, classes were canceled the rest of the day and we found ourselves huddled up around TVs watching the news unfold, trying to make sense of the senseless.

It was 25 years ago on Friday, and I still remember it so vividly, as I'm sure many of you do. And our world experienced panic and fear and a collective sense of this, this loss of safety and security that we had maybe taken for granted up to that point. And in the midst of this time People turn to their faith. They turn to the church. Sherwood Oaks opened our doors that night for worship and prayer.

We left them open throughout the week just so that this could be a place of refuge and sanctuary from all of the chaos that was happening around us, all of the confusion. Tom said that that Sunday, September 16th, was one of the largest worship gatherings at Sherwood Oaks. Has ever had, people pouring into this place looking for comfort, looking for peace. And Tom sent me a sermon from that Sunday last week, and as I was reading through, towards the end it reminded me of something that happened in the aftermath that week. There were some national leaders that were calling on sports leagues to reconvene, to start playing again even that weekend.

They said that they needed our country needed a diversion.

And Tom quoted Herm Edwards, who was the coach of the New York Jets at the time. And if you're familiar with Herm Edwards, he's not known for keeping his opinions to himself. And so he took offense to that idea that the NFL and the players needed to be a diversion. And he said, the country needs a diversion? You know what they should do?

Go to church, go pray. And a lot of time has passed since 9/11. I read this last week that about a third of our nation either wasn't born or was too young to remember, but I know that many of us have those memories seared into our minds. And even though that was so long ago, we continue to experience moments of panic and fear and confusion and chaos today. And there are global things that happen like 9/11 that changed everything.

There's the global pandemic of COVID There's the global financial crisis that affects everybody. But then there are a lot of things that happen more personal that don't get headlines, that don't get news stories about them, that maybe we carry and nobody else knows.

A phone call comes, papers are delivered to your house, you have a conversation that just rocks your world.

As I was wrapping up my sermon on Friday, I got a message from our daughter Adeline, who's a freshman at South, saying, hey, we're in

lockdown and I don't think it's a drill.

There was somebody who broke into the school. Not sure what was going on. Police went in to try to find them. Didn't know if it was an active shooter situation, what was going on. She said that her class was huddled up in a corner.

There were some kids that were crying.

I heard sirens blaring down Rogers heading that way, and my heart sunk like I was experiencing some of the things that I was just writing. About for this morning. It's unsettling.

And where we turn in those moments matters. In our text today, I think Jesus gives us some insight into what he had in mind when he built his church, that it would be a place of peace and hope in a world that is filled with fear, that when others are grabbing for power and security, purity when, when others are trying to inflict terror in the hearts of others. The church was built to be a beacon of hope and light in a sometimes dark and senseless world. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to the, the text that Maggie read for us this morning. Matthew chapter 16 is where we're going to be landing this morning.

You have a pew Bible, pull it out there. Matthew chapter 16. And over the next several weeks, we are gonna be in this series looking at when Jesus says, I will build my church, what does he mean? Like, what kind of church is Jesus building? What kind of church did Jesus have in mind when he resurrected back up into heaven and sent his disciples out to build his church?

And I think that what we see in the book of Acts and the early church, and really even still today, what we see is that the church church is so radical. It is, it is so unlike anything that the world has ever experienced that it stands out, or at least it should stand out in the midst of other clubs and organizations and groups to be a part of.

As I was writing out this series a few months ago, I kept coming back to this phrase that one of my daughters uses. She's Gen Alpha, which if If you are not in a core class, our core class started off last Wednesday. It's great just to see so many people coming in. My wife and I, we're taking the one for Gen Alpha, like learning how to raise and disciple and mentor Gen Alpha. And so we're going to be, I think at one point going over some of their phrases because they have some very unique phrases.

And one of the phrases that we hear in our house from time to time is, Man, that person's just built different. You heard that? Built different. It's, it's used to describe someone who is unusually tough, who is, who is unusually strong, resilient. If you find a person like

that, be like, man, that guy is built different.

There's something that stands out about that person, makes them rise up above everyone else. They're able to stay calm under pressure when everybody else is in a panic. And I think Jesus intended his church to be built different, to stand strong in the midst of difficult times because we are built on a solid foundation that will not crack, that will not wash away. Look at what our text says. I wanna just We're going to go through it piece by piece this morning.

And it opens up with these words. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi. So let's pause right here. Whenever you're reading your Bible, maybe doing some study and you come across a name or a place, it's good to know what is there anything unique or special about this place? Because sometimes location can bring some context that helps us understand what was going on a little bit better.

And so let's just pause real fast and focus on this place, Caesarea Philippi. It was this region that was known for a few things. Number one, there was a temple that was established and built in about 300 BC that was dedicated to the Greek god Pan. Pan, if you've seen pictures of Pan, usually depicted as half man, half goat, built different. He's associated with shepherds and flocks and wilderness.

If you've ever seen a picture of Pan, he might be playing a flute. It's where we get the idea of a pan flute. Everything about Pan seems and sounds incredibly innocent and harmless, but Pan had a darker side and was believed to inflict sudden, overwhelming, and irrational fear inside of people. His name, Pan, is literally where we get our English word panic.

Second thing about Caesarea Philippi, there was a deep cave there. And this cave at the time had a little bit of a temple that was built around it, but the water in that cave went incredibly deep. I mean, we know how deep it is now. People then didn't fully know exactly how deep it was, but caves and kind of that modern thought represented places that led to the underworld. Caves were places, especially ones that sunk deep into the earth, were places to be They were places that led to the depths of hell.

They were places that were a reminder of the realm of the dead.

The third thing that we need to know about Caesarea Philippi is that it actually has its name because Herod the Great built a temple to honor Caesar there. He wanted to kind of gain favor from Rome, and so he built a temple for people to worship Caesar. And so Caesarea Philippi was literally a place to worship political power.

I think it's interesting that Jesus takes his disciples to this place known for panic and fear, for death, for worship of power.

And he asked his disciples in verse 13, who do people say the Son of Man is?

And they replied, well, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Now don't miss this, their response here. I mean, these are some really important people in the faith. Like these are compliments that the disciples are giving Jesus when they say, Jesus, this is what we hear as we follow you and we hear the conversations happen around you. People are saying these things.

They're saying, man, maybe he's John the Baptist resurrected, come back from the dead. Maybe he is Elijah, one of the greatest prophets prophets who has come back to speak for God. Maybe he's Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. They speak well of Jesus. These are prestigious comparisons, and yet every single one of them is inadequate.

Every single one of them misses who Jesus really is. And I think it shows us that it is possible to think highly of Jesus, and still misunderstand who he is. I think even today, if you ask people, hey, who is Jesus to you? People will give you a variety of different answers. Oh, he was a good and moral teacher.

Jesus, man, that guy, like, he did so many good things and he started a religion that was supposed to help people love others, love their enemy, care for others. Jesus was a servant. He was a social revolutionary. He came to the defense of the defenseless and stood with those that others shoved to the side. And like, these are all good things, true things to say about Jesus, and yet they're incomplete.

You can think highly of Jesus and still completely miss who he is and what he came to do. And after asking his disciples, who do people say that I am? He turns his attention to them. Verse 15, but what about you? He asked, who do you say I am?

And this is the most important question anyone could ever ask you, and it's the most important answer you can ever give. Who do you say Jesus is?

Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. So in this place that is surrounded by temples dedicated to false idols, this place that was a place of worship to false gods, in this place that represents panic and fear, fear and death, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is the Christ, that he is the Son of the living God, and he says that Jesus is Lord. Everything around Peter said that Caesar was Lord. Everything said that you need to bend your knee to political power. Everything said that the gods were

powerful and to be feared.

Feared. Everything around him said that death gets the final word, and yet it is in that place that Peter declares Jesus is Lord.

And Jesus doesn't correct him.

Jesus doesn't say, oh, take it down a notch because we don't want to blaspheme against God. Like, not— no, Jesus affirms it.

Jesus says in verse 17, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Jesus uses a little wordplay in this passage. You may be familiar with it. Simon Peter, he gives him a new name. He calls him Peter, Petros. It's a word that means a small stone, pebble.

And then Jesus says that this word rock, it's It's petra. It means this large slab of rock, this solid foundation. And we know that Peter will end up becoming an instrument in God's hands in starting the church, but the church is not built on the small stone of Peter. The church is not built on a pastor or a personality. The church is not built on the elders or a certain ministry or a certain tradition.

The church is built on Jesus and the confession that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus says, I will build my church.

My church. The church belongs to no one and nothing but him. Jesus loves his church. Jesus died for his church. Jesus is the head of the church.

Jesus will one day return for his church, and in the meantime, he continues to build his church today.

And the question for us 2,000 years later is, what kind of church does Jesus want? To build? If it belongs to him, we are his. What kind of church does Jesus want to build? And that's what we're going to be looking at over the next several weeks.

But I think the church that Jesus has in mind, it is not a building. It is a people. And the word that he uses for church is the word ecclesia. Ecclesia wasn't even a Christian, like a faith And ecclesia is just any gathering of people who are called out for a specific time or a specific purpose. And so Jesus borrows that word from society and he says, this is what I am building.

I am building a group of people who I am calling out of the world for a specific time and a specific purpose. Jesus is building a church. People of peace in a world of panic. Jesus is building a people of love and humility in a world of division and that idolizes politicians and power. Jesus is building a people of life who are marred by death.

Jesus built his church different, and it continues to be a beacon of light shining in the darkness of this world. And we are that light. It's not the building.

It's not the church sign on Rogers Road or Sarah that's lit up at night. No, we, we are that light that shines in that darkness. We are his church. We are ordinary followers of Jesus. Who walk into frightened places carrying peace, who walk into lonely places carrying presence, not just our presence, but the presence of the living God living in us.

We are the ones who walk into divided places and bring unity. We walk into hurting places and we bring hope. Jesus says, I will build my church church, and this is the church that he is building.

When fear takes over the world, those of us who are followers should be asking ourselves, are we a non-anxious presence pointing to him? When someone is hurting, do we move towards them? When everyone else is, is protecting themselves, do we, do we give of ourselves generously?

When everyone else is turning to power to divide and be divisive, do people encounter you differently?

Whenever followers of Jesus choose love over fear, generosity over protection, hope over despair, there's a little bit of light that shines into the darkness of the world.

As the events of 9/11 unfolded 25 years ago, like, no one knew the extent of what was happening. It was all just chaotic and taking place so fast. And what do you mean there's another plane and this plane's diverted? And so the FAA just made the decision, just ground all planes right now. We just need to get everyone on the ground.

So people found themselves in places very different than their expected destination. And all those planes that had left earlier that morning or even the night before coming from Europe or Asia, coming across the Atlantic Ocean, heading to places like Boston and New York and wherever, they all of a sudden had no place go, and so they had to find somewhere. And all of those planes were diverted to a small town in Newfoundland called Gander, way up there in Canada.

And over the course of the day, about 38 planes from all over the world landed in this little community of about 10,000 people.

People. These large jumbo jets filled with people was landing in this old abandoned airfield having no idea what was going on, no idea why they were stopping.

And about 6,500 passengers and crew showed up on this little town. Strangers from different countries, different backgrounds, speaking different languages landed in Gander confused, scared, desperately trying to reach out to see if people are okay.

And the people of Gander did something incredible. If you've ever seen the musical Come From Away, they do just such a great job of capturing it. The people of Gander opened up schools and community buildings. They prepared meals and they gathered bedding and clothes. Some of them even welcomed some of the passengers into their own homes, giving up their beds so that they could sleep in them and be comfortable.

And over the course of the next several days, people who had absolutely nothing in common had become neighbors. They'd become friends. They cared for one another. They looked out for one another.

And Gander, Newfoundland shines as a bright spot in a very dark time in our world. And I think it's a picture of what Jesus had in mind when he stood in this place associated with panic and fear and death and said, I will build my church. In places like this, a place and a people who stand as beacons of light shining in the darkness of our world. That is the church Jesus is building. That is the church that he is building at Sherwood Oaks.

That is the church that he is building inside of each one of us.

So as we close today, I just want to take a moment and pray this prayer. I don't have it up on the screen, but it's an easy one. I'm just going to say it a couple of times, and I just want to invite you to pray it.

Jesus, make me a part of what you are building.

Just take a few silent moments and pray that prayer. Jesus, make me a part of what you are building.

Maybe today you were in that place of panic, fear, unknown in your life. You're not sure where to turn, and so you came here hoping to find hope today. If that's you, we've got some people in the corners of our worship center here. In a moment, they'll be standing with the orange lanyards, and they'd love to pray with you, carry that burden with you so you don't have to do it alone. Maybe you're here today and, and you are ready to make Peter's confession of faith your own confession of faith.

You are ready to lay down your life, declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and you want to surrender and follow him. And if you're ready to make that choice, we're ready for you. Maybe today's the day that you enter into those baptismal waters and lay down the old life and take up new life in Christ. We're going to come to a time of communion. If you're new with us this morning, we do communion a little differently.

Instead of passing it, we have some stations in the front and in the back. And here in a moment we're just gonna give a time of prayer and silence and reflection. And whenever you're ready, you can get up, grab one of the cups in the baskets, take it back to your seat for taking communion. Let it be a time where we remember that the darkest moment in human history, Jesus shined as a light. His resurrection gave hope then, and it continues to give hope to us today.

So I'm going to pray for us and then we can enter into this time.

Jesus, thank you for the church that you are building.

Lord, we don't always get it right.

There are times, Father, when we are consumed by the wrong things. We are distracted.

There are times where your church has an opportunity to shine as a light, and instead what we do is we just add to the darkness and the pain.

Instead of drawing people in, we've turned people away.

So Lord, as we close in prayer this morning. I just want to confess that we've not always been— I've not always been the church that you have desired.

But Lord, would you hear our heart this morning?

Would we be a people in a place that truly longs to, to, to draw close to you and to help others do the same? May we be a place that is that beacon of shining in a dark world, a place of hope in a world that is filled with fear and panic.

Lord, to be a church like that, it starts with each one of us.

And so as you are building your church here locally within our community of Sherwood Oaks, Lord, may you find us faithful to you.

Surrendering to you, declaring who you are, and helping others find and follow you.

Lord, build your church, build your kingdom here and through us.

In Jesus' name, amen.