

# Body, Bride, Boat

*Selected Readings  
Exploring the  
Meaning of Church*

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# Introduction

Most of us have heard symbolic language like Body, Bride, or Boat used to describe the Church. Let me invite you to sink deeper into these images.

Symbols reveal layers of truth that can feel flattened or reduced when expressed as static doctrinal statements. As we are seeking to follow Jesus, we can draw encouragement and guidance from historical symbols for the community of faith. The metaphors might appeal to you, strike you as odd, or seem off-putting. Instead of throwing out the ones that you find challenging, allow God to highlight the wisdom embedded in the imagery.

There are many historical symbols for the Church that deserve exploration: Church as the family of God, as the Vine's branches, as a building set upon the cornerstone, and so on. I hope that the imagery of Body, Bride, and Boat will whet your appetite for ongoing discovery.

May you experience the truth and invitation of each image. May you sense your interconnectedness with Christians present and past. And may God inspire your mind with fresh ways of envisioning and expressing the glorious reality of being his people, united in love and purpose.

Grace Pouch

## How to use this booklet

In each section you will find:

- An essay introducing the key themes of each image
- Questions for individual reflection and group discussion
- Bible passages that present foundational truths related to each image
- Quotes from historical Christian voices that show us how these metaphors shape our life together as local congregations and participants in the universal Church

At the end of this booklet you will find an invitation to continue thinking with God about his call to be joined to him as a member of his Church.



# Body

INTRODUCTION BY DREW DIXON

The chattering of children. The aches of the elderly. The breaking of bread. The sound of song. These are but a few of the embodied sensations of the gathered body of Christ.

Every age must wrestle with particular facets of theology. The first-century church faced the question of Gentile inclusion—we read about this in Acts and the letters of Paul. The fourth- and fifth-century church sought to articulate the persons of the Trinity through the foundational creeds. The church of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century wrestled with questions of authority that led to the Reformation.

What are the most pressing theological questions for us today?

In a world increasingly mediated by technology, incarnation is one of the most important theological categories for us to recover. We must

remember that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14) and consider its implications. When Jesus came, the transcendent God became a body—the omnipresent God became local. It was because of the local, embodied person of Jesus that John could write, “We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” The glory of God was tangibly experienced through embodied reality. This was true for the gospel writers, and it is true today.

Though Jesus has ascended and is seated with the Father, there is still a way in which he remains incarnate on earth. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that, “For those who belong to him, Jesus’ departure does not mean a loss but rather a new gift. For the first disciples the bodily community with Jesus did not mean anything different or anything more than what we have today.”<sup>1</sup> That “new gift” is the body of Christ that we know as the Church.

Despite technology’s gifts, the great temptation of our age is to become increasingly disembodied beings living through pixels on screens. But the Word is meant to become flesh and dwell among us in our localized, embodied expressions of the Church. This is where we are meant to see the glory of God.

In our incarnated fellowship, we find our truest sense of belonging as we share meals, listen to stories, and wrestle with our common faith. Being face to face forces us to reckon with our differences. In mutual presence, we learn to really see one another and be formed by one another so that, together, we become more like Christ. As we are reconciled to one another and seek to love our neighbors, we show forth the glory of God on earth.

The biblical language of “the body of Christ” is a beautiful metaphor of mutuality, diversity, organic growth, and unity. It is also a literal invitation to the fullness of life within our local, embodied communities. In the chattering of our children, the aches of our elderly, the breaking of our bread, and the sound of our songs together, may we once again see “the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 193.



### Questions to ponder:

- When have you experienced true belonging of body and soul?
- How has community helped you discover your unique gifts and become more like Christ?
- Who is someone different from you that shows you something of Christ? How is your life richer because of their presence?

## Body: Selected Readings

### 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

*If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body.*

*The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this.*

*But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members*

*may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

**SADHU SUNDAR SINGH (1889–1929)**

The Church is called “the body of Christ” because the relation between Christ and Christians is not that between a master and his servants. It is more than that. Christians are Christ’s own parts. They are not only friends of Christ... He breathes through them.

**CLARE OF ASSISI (1194–1253)**

I breathe again in the Lord with elation... that you are supplying in wonderful ways what is lacking both in me and in the other sisters who are following in the footsteps of the poor and humble Jesus Christ.... And, to use as my own the words of the apostle himself, I consider you someone who is God’s own helper and who supports the drooping limbs of his ineffable body.

**C.S. LEWIS (1898–1963)**

For the church is not a human society of people united by their natural affinities but the Body of Christ, in which all members, however different (and He rejoices in their differences and by no means wishes to iron them out) must share the common life, complementing and helping one another precisely by their differences.

**Romans 12:3–10**

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

*For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.*

**LILIAS TROTTER (1853–1928)**

It is by the Divine indwelling that our true, eternal personality dawns, and for the expression of the special manifestation of Himself which is entrusted to each one of us. The protoplasm that quickens each different seed is one and the same essence, but in no two does it find the same expression. He needs the whole Church to manifest His whole character and accomplish His appointed ministry, and so the individual development must differ widely in everything but the common vital principle. Life—eternal life—is the essence of all—life-receiving and life-giving.

**ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY (1033–1109)**

Keep your body and your members with that reverence which is befitting.... Your eyes are the eyes of Christ. Therefore you may not turn the eyes of Christ to behold vanity, for Christ is the Truth, and all vanity is contrary to the truth. Your mouth is the mouth of Christ. You must not therefore open—in slanders and lies or even in idle words—that mouth which should be opened only for the praise of God and the encouragement of neighbor.

**JOHN CALVIN (1509–1564)**

We shall benefit very much from the Sacrament if this thought has been impressed and engraved upon our minds: that none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without [our] injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at the same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving Him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that, as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is not spread among all the rest, so we ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched with compassion for him.

### **Ephesians 1:16–23**

*I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.*

*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.*

*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

#### **KOKICHI KUROSAKI (1886–1970)**

All Christians are one Body in Christ—we cannot create this, but only recognize it. However, we *must* recognize it and then fearlessly practice it, disregarding our differences in doctrine, forms, and interpretations of the Bible. We must receive one another on the ground of a mutual fellowship with God in living union with Christ in the Spirit.... Only as we take our fellowship with Christ as the center of Christian faith, will all Christians realize their oneness.... Is not our fellowship, however varied, with the same Lord? Is not the same Savior our one Head?... If we will practice this living union with Christ, loving each other without any concern about sects and denominations, doctrines or forms, then we shall have the Body of Christ with Him as Head. This is the Ekklesia in its truest and purest sense. Therefore, the Ekklesia is not an institution, not a system, not theology, not the words of the Bible, and not any ritual or ceremony. The Ekklesia exists where there is this life union with God through Christ.

#### **THOMAS AQUINAS (C. 1225–1274)**

Because of the fact that grace and truth come to others from Christ, it is fitting that He should be the head of the Church. Sensation and movement are, in a way, conveyed from the head to the other members that are conformed to the head in nature. In like manner grace and truth are conveyed from Christ to other men.

## **Ephesians 4:1-5, 15-16**

*I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.... But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

### **THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX (1873-1897)**

I saw that the Church must have a heart, that this heart must be on fire with love. I saw that it was love alone which moved her other members, and that, were this love to fail, apostles would no longer spread the Gospel, and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I saw that all vocations are summed up in love, and that love is all in all, embracing every time and place because it is eternal. In a transport of ecstatic joy I cried: "Jesus, my love, I have at last found my vocation; it is love."

### **GEORGE MACDONALD (1824-1905)**

When the mind of Christ, the life of the Head, courses through that atom which is a man within the slowly revivifying body, when he is alive too, then the love of the brothers is there as conscious life. From Christ through the neighbors comes the life that makes him a part of the body.



# Bride

INTRODUCTION BY JULIA ROLLER

When my religion professor's phone rang during office hours, he'd always hang up and announce, "That was my bride." His words made me smile because I knew they had been married for decades. There's a newness, a sense of possibility and excitement, even tenderness, about the word "bride" that is not always conveyed in the word "wife."

Despite these positive connotations, the image of the Church as Bride may feel awkward and uncomfortable to many of us. Maybe it feels too feminine. Or, conversely, too patriarchal. But in the Bible, the Bride metaphor is used in a communal rather than individual sense. The Bride is not you or I; it is the Church. *Together* we have been chosen and called. *Together* we learn to love the Lord our God and stay faithful only to him. *Together* we long for union with Christ. *Together* we will rejoice when he returns.

The Church as Bride evokes a feeling of being chosen, a sense of being cared for, a promise of union and fulfillment, and an atmosphere of celebration, but perhaps most of all, it is an image of love—the love the Bridegroom has for his beloved over all else. We find this image in the Bible everywhere from Hosea and Jeremiah to the Song of Songs and Revelation, not to mention the words of Jesus and the letters of Paul.

We, the Church, have been chosen by God for this special love relationship. We belong to God, and only to God. The Creator of the Universe loves us and desires *our* love in return! It is a promise from God that we are to answer, joyfully and freely, with corresponding holiness and faithfulness. It is a promise for the future. God says of Israel in Hosea, “And I will take you for my wife forever... and you shall *know* the Lord” (Hosea 2:19-20, emphasis added).

As we see from this quotation, part of the Church’s role as Bride is to answer this magnificent invitation to know the Lord. “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6, echoed in Matthew 9:13). God longs for us to know him fully. We cultivate our relationship with God by seeking this knowledge in an ongoing process of mutual self-revelation.

This love relationship between the Church and God has another, deeper layer: the promise of union. Just as two married people somehow become “one flesh” (Mark 10:7-8), in what Paul refers to as “a great mystery” (Ephesians 5:32), Christ wants to be joined to us, as he is joined to the Father. Again, here we see that the Bride is the whole Church. In John 17, Jesus prays that we will be one with each other, that we have unity within the Church, as well as being one with him and the Father. Is it possible that knowing and loving God fully comes only after we seek to know and love one another?

This profound connection Jesus describes is something our souls crave—a longing Blaise Pascal describes as an “infinite abyss [that] can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, such a promise, to be one as Jesus and his Father are one, such a commitment, is something to joyfully anticipate and celebrate, as we see in the wedding feast language in Revelation. Our longings will be fulfilled. As C.S. Lewis says, our “thirst shall be quenched.”

<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, p. 45



### Questions to ponder:

- How does mutual self-revelation strengthen a relationship? How can this be applied to Christ and his Bride?
- Teresa of Ávila describes our union with God as two candle flames joining or rain falling into a river and becoming part of it. How would you describe the union in your own words?
- What makes it hard to be unified as a local congregation, or as many congregations forming one Christian Church? Have you seen glimmers of unity in the Church that give you hope for the Bride's unified love for Christ?

## Bride: Selected Readings

### Hosea 2:16–20

*On that day, says the Lord, you will call me "my husband...". I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground, and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.*

*And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.*

### BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (1090–1153)

Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return however unequal though it be. For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.

The Bridegroom's love, or rather the Love which is the Bridegroom, asks in return nothing but faithful love. Let the beloved, then, love in return. Should not a bride love, and above all, Love's bride?

**GREGORY THE GREAT (C. 540–604)**

We must take note that in the sacred scriptures the Lord sometimes calls himself “Lord,” sometimes “Father” and sometimes “Bridegroom.” For when he wishes to be feared, he calls himself “Lord;” when he wishes to be honored, “Father;” when he wishes to be loved, “Bridegroom.”

As honor is more worthy than fear, God rejoices much more to be called “Father” than “Lord.” As love is dearer than honor, God rejoices much more to be called “Bridegroom” than “Father.” The Lord and the church are therefore not called “Lord” and “Handmaiden” in this book [Song of Songs] but “Bridegroom” and “Bride” so that he may be eagerly served not only in fear and in reverence but also in love and so that a deep interior attachment to God may be aroused by this exterior language.

When he calls himself “Lord,” he indicates that we have been created by him; when he calls himself “Father,” he indicates that we have been adopted by him; when he calls himself “Bridegroom,” he indicates that we have been united to him. Moreover, it is far more significant to be united to God than to be created or adopted by him. Therefore, when “Bridegroom” is written in this book, something quite lofty is conveyed since it reveals the bond of union.

**Ephesians 5:25b–27, 31–32**

*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, so that she may be holy and without blemish.*

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I am speaking about Christ and the church.*

**JOHN CALVIN (1509–1564)**

To this union alone it is owing that, in regard to us, the Savior has not come in vain. To this is to be referred that sacred marriage, by which we become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and so one with him, for it is by the Spirit alone that he unites himself to us.

**S.J. STONE (1839–1900)**

The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is his new creation,  
By water and the word;  
From Heav'n he came and sought her  
To be his holy bride;  
With his own blood he bought her,  
And for her life he died.

**John 17:20–26**

*[From Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room]*

*"I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

*"Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them."*

**TERESA OF ÁVILA (1515–1582)**

In the spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river. Or it is like what we have when a little stream enters the sea, there is no means of separating the two. Or, like the bright light entering a room through two different windows; although the streams of light are separate when entering the room, they become one.

**HADEWIJCH (C. 1200–1260)**

O beloved, why has not Love sufficiently overwhelmed you and engulfed you in her abyss? Alas! When Love is so sweet, why do you not fall deep into her? And why do you not touch God deeply enough in the abyss of his Nature, which is so unfathomable? Sweet love, give yourself for Love's sake fully to God in love.

**ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY (1033–1109)**

O Lord our God,  
grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart,  
that so desiring we may seek and find you;  
and so finding you we may love you;  
and loving you we may hate those sins  
from which you have redeemed us;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ.

**Revelation 19:6–9**

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,*

*“Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord God the Almighty reigns.*

*Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*

*and his bride has made herself ready;*

*to her it has been granted to be clothed*

*with fine linen, bright and pure”—*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

*And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”*

**VENERABLE BEDE (C. 673–735)**

It says that they are invited to a supper, not to a mere lunch, for at the end of days the supper will certainly be a great feast. Therefore, when the time of the present life is ended, those who come to the refreshment of the heavenly contemplation are truly invited to the supper of the Lamb.

**ANDREW OF CAESAREA (563–614)**

The marriage supper of Christ is the feast of those who are being saved and the joy that accompanies it. The blessed will come into these things when they enter into the eternal bridal chamber with the holy Bridegroom of their purified souls. For he who has promised this is faithful.

Since there are many blessings in the coming age, which surpass every understanding, the participation in them is indicated through various terms.... Sometimes they are called “paradise” on account of the everlasting banquet of good things; sometimes they are called the “bosom of Abraham” on account of the rest of those who repose there, or the “bridechamber” and “marriage” because of the endless joy and the perfect and inexpressible union of God with his servants.

**Revelation 22:16–17, 20–21**

*“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”*

*The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”*

*And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”*

*And let everyone who is thirsty come.*

*Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.*

*The one who testifies to these things says,*

*“Surely I am coming soon.”*

*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.*

**MECHTILD OF MAGDEBURG (C. 1208–1282)**

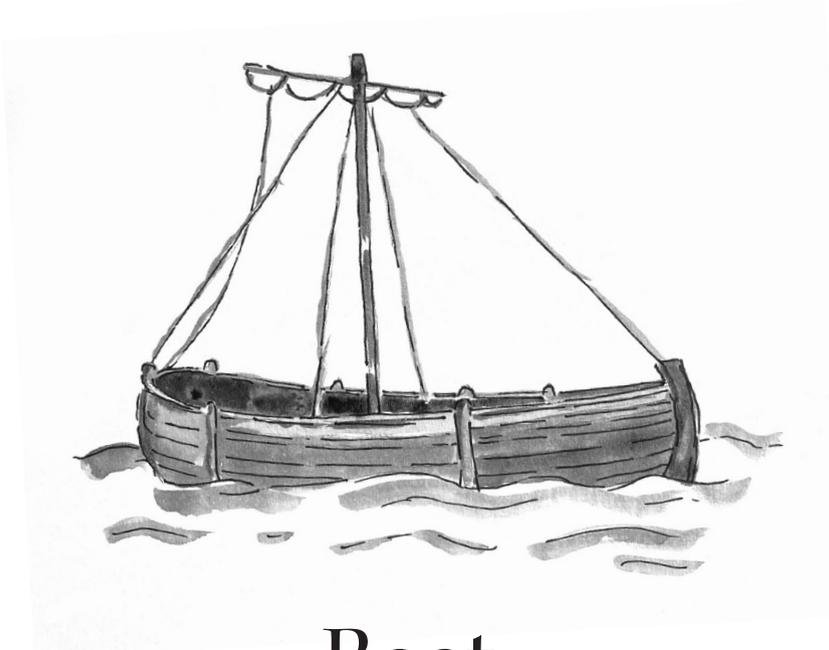
Lord, you are my lover, my longing, my flowing stream, my sun, and I am your reflection.

**C.S. LEWIS (1898–1963)**

Hitherto you have experienced truth only with the abstract intellect. I will bring you where you can taste it like honey and be embraced by it as by a bridegroom. Your thirst shall be quenched.

**LILIAS TROTTER (1853–1928)**

This is the Bride’s calling—to have no room for anything but Jesus. Blessed are they who hear it and respond.



# Boat

INTRODUCTION BY GRACE POUCH

Body and Bride are New Testament metaphors for the Church. But what about Boat?

The Church is never compared to a boat in Scripture, but around the third century, Christians recognized a parallel to their own experience in the gospel stories that involved a boat. As a symbol for the Church, the boat helped them envision how to remain faithful followers of Jesus while their community was rocked by horrific persecution, political upheaval, and doctrinal disputes. It's no wonder that these early brothers and sisters saw their own story in the plight of the apostles in a sinking boat, crying out to Jesus, "Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38)

Our boats may be rocked by different waves, but we can find encouragement in this symbol, too.

In the gospels, the boat is a sacramental space for learning to see that God is intimately concerned with the everyday work and struggles of his people. Labor is not separate from discipleship. In the same way, life in the Church must integrate following Christ with the fullness of our daily experiences—our vocations, relationships, and public interactions.

A friend of mine was able to ride in a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee that was similar to the ones the disciples used. She marveled at its size—much larger than you'd think. There's no way one person could have managed a fishing boat like that alone, she observed. We need one another—in our local congregations and as the wider Church—in order to proclaim the gospel and be fishers of men.

The idea of working together as the ship's crew is reflected in nautical elements in church architecture. The 4th century *Apostolic Constitutions* gives these instructions: "Call an assembly of the Church, as one command[ing] a great ship,... charging the deacons as mariners to prepare places for the brethren as for passengers... Let the building be long, with its head to the east, with its vestries on both sides at the east end, and so it will be like a ship."<sup>3</sup> The place where the people sit in some church buildings is still called the nave (related to our words "navy" and "navigate"). You could even say that any physical space where we gather for Christian worship, learning, service, and fellowship becomes a holy *vessel*.

Finally, in the gospels, the boat is a place where hearts are revealed. At sea, the disciples must face their limits, fears, failures, and under-formed faith. But Jesus turns the boat into an intimate classroom to instruct and heal them. He tells his friends, "Do not fear," and provides experiences to build their faith. Here they witness miracles, learn to recognize Jesus' voice, and, most importantly, spend time with their Master.

Disciples today are still "in the boat" with Jesus. Following him means journeying together as local congregations and pulling together as the Church universal. So what happens if we sense the boat veering off course or see great storms on the horizon? In these moments we may wonder whether we should jump ship. But sticking it out together in the Church is a critical means God is using to transform us from selfish, bent creatures into radiant, Christlike partners in the kingdom of God.

<sup>3</sup> *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book II, LVII.



### Questions to ponder:

- What external storms does the Church at large face today? Are any of these particularly intense for your congregation?
- How is your community learning to let Jesus direct your energy and effort as you “let down your nets” in various ways?
- Have there been failures that revealed the need for more growth in character among your boat’s members? How might Jesus be inviting you to give grace to others on this journey with you?

## Boat: Selected Readings

### Luke 5:1-10

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.*

*When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”*

*When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.*

*But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”*

**C.H. SPURGEON (1834–1892)**

You men and women that sit before me, you are by the shore of a great sea of human life swarming with the souls of men. You live in the midst of millions; but if you will follow Jesus, and be faithful to him, and true to him, and do what he bids you, he will make you fishers of men. You are not fit for it, but he will make you fit. You cannot do it of yourselves, but he will make you do it. You do not know how to spread nets and draw shoals of fish to shore, but he will teach you. Only follow him, and he will make you fishers of men.

**LESLIE NEWBIGIN (1909–1998)**

The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move—hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord, who will gather all into one. Therefore, the nature of the Church is never to be fully defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological.

**JOHN PAUL II (1920–2005)**

Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

**Matthew 8:23–27**

*And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm suddenly arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves, but he was asleep.*

*And they went and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?”*

*Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”*

**TERTULLIAN (150–240)**

But that little ship did present a figure of the Church, in that she is disquieted “in the sea,” that is, in the world, “by the waves,” that is, by persecutions and temptations; the Lord, through patience, sleeping as it were, until, roused in their last extremities by the prayers of the saints, He checks the world, and restores tranquility to His own.

**AMY CARMICHAEL (1867-1951)**

Thou art the Lord who slept upon the pillow,  
Thou art the Lord who soothed the furious sea,  
What matters beating wind and tossing billow  
If only we are in the boat with Thee?

Hold us quiet through the age-long minute  
While Thou art silent and the wind is shrill :  
Can the boat sink while Thou, dear Lord, are in it;  
Can the heart faint that waiteth on Thy will?

**WILLIAM WHITING (1825-1878)**

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bid'st the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea.

O Christ, Whose voice the waters heard  
And hushed their raging at Thy word,  
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,  
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, Who didst brood  
Upon the chaos dark and rude,  
And bid its angry tumult cease,  
And give, for wild confusion, peace;  
O hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea!

O Trinity of love and power,  
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;  
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,  
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;  
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee  
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

**HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME (C. 170–235)**

The sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed; for she has with her the skilled Pilot, Christ.

**John 6:16–21**

*When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.*

**PETER CHRYSOLOGUS (C. 380–450)**

Christ gets into the vessel of his church, always ready to calm the waves of the world. He leads those who believe in him through safe sailing to the heavenly homeland and makes those whom he made to share in his humanity citizens of his land. Christ does not need the vessel, therefore, but the vessel needs Christ. Without the heavenly helmsman the vessel of the church is unable to sail over the sea of the world and, against critical odds, arrive at the heavenly harbor.

**LILIAS TROTTER (1853–1928)**

I am seeing more and more that we begin to learn what it is to walk by faith when we learn to spread out all that is against us: all our physical weakness, loss of mental power, spiritual inability—all that is against us inwardly and outwardly—as sails to the wind and expect them to be vehicles for the power of Christ to rest upon us. It is so simple and self-evident—but so long in the learning!

**BONIFACE (672–754)**

In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course.

# Invitation

If third-century Christians developed the boat metaphor, God may continue to point us to new symbols for the Church that deepen our wisdom for being his people.

My mom was out walking on the beach one day, praying and asking the Lord to give her a fresh word of encouragement to pass along to the church that she pastors. She saw a small clump of coral at her feet, and she sensed God say, “Consider the coral.”

She picked it up and studied it—as one would study the scriptures—and found it packed with truth about life together as a congregation. A small piece of coral is actually made up of many tiny individual organisms. These organisms share a structural skeleton that binds them together as a living community, and these communities form a vast reef under the sea. Healthy reefs, made up of many different types of corals, bring life and vitality to the ocean, give shelter to other living things, and protect coastlines.

It is a beautiful image of the Church: a vast network of congregations of all sorts and sizes, made up of millions of individual souls, united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism to radiate God’s love to the world.

What is the Lord drawing you to notice about the Church and your place in it?

Perhaps there is another symbol in the world that will help amplify God’s truth to you.

On the next two pages is space for you to make notes as you sink deeper into scriptural testimony about the Church and all the beautiful illustrations in the world that God uses to corroborate these truths.

Grace Pouch







*Experience the truth and invitation of historic symbols for the Church, and find fresh ways of envisioning and expressing the glorious reality of being God's people, united in love and purpose.*

#### CONTRIBUTORS



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