

## INTRODUCE

Good morning Fathom Church. Man, it's so good to see y'all!  
My name is Chris Martin and I'm the Lead Pastor here...though you never would've guessed it this summer, right?

So, if I haven't met you, that's because I've been on sabbatical for the last 3 months...

## THANK STAFF/ELDERS & KYLE KNIGHT

## TRANSITION

And today is my first Sunday back preaching...

- so, I've got some pent-up energy...
  - I'll probs only preach for a couple hours.
- Also, fun fact...
  - this is the 400<sup>th</sup> sermon preached at Fathom Church...

We normally preach right through books of the Bible verse-by-verse...

And we will do that all Fall...just for a little sneak-peek...we're going to do **SLIDE** **EPHESIANS**

It's going to be awesome!

- But for the next few weeks
- I'm gonna preach more theologically driven sermons
- in a mini-series we're calling **SLIDE** **WHAT I LEARNED...**

## ILLUSTRATION: INJURY

You see,

- before I left for my sabbatical,
- I preached a message on Sabbatical,
- and I talked about how I tend to rest.

You see, in my line of work...

- I study and read,
- I sit at my computer and write,
- and I meet with people.

So, my rest is normally active.

- I like going for runs,
- and mountain biking,
- and fishing,
- and skiing...
- pretty much anything awesome!

And that was my plan for Sabbatical. Active rest.

- So, on the first day of sabbatical, I ran 8 miles.
- On the second day I went for a 13 mile mountain bike ride.
- On the third day of sabbatical I went for another 5 mile run.

But on the fourth day of sabbatical something unexpected happened.

I was going to have lunch with another pastor at Breckenridge Brewery, and he texted and said,

- *“How about we meet early and we can ride  
○ my electric longboards along the Platte River.”*

- I said, “*Sounds great*”
  - Right!?! More active rest!

And just so you know,

- I skateboarded as a teenager.
- And I had a longboard in college that I rode all over the place.
- And I’ve snowboarded for more than 25 years.
  - So, this felt right up my alley.

And listen, it was really fun...for the first hour.

- We rode along the Platte into Chatfield State Park,
- and then we road up the path to the top of the dam.
- And then we rode across the dam.

All awesome.

- But then we started our descent down the dam,
- back to the Platte to get to Breck for lunch...

And I hadn’t gone downhill on this board yet.

- So, on the controls there’s a trigger to accelerate,
- and a thumb lever for the brake.
- But I hadn’t needed to use the brake
  - because I could just release the trigger
  - and the board would slow down by itself.

But as we started down the back side of the dam, I started to gain speed.

- And it got faster...
- and faster...

And I looked at the speed on the control

- and it said 20...
- 25...
- 28...
- Nope! That was it. Too fast!

Now, what my friend...who shall remain nameless...

- failed to mention
- was when you touched the brake lever
- it gave a tiny little jolt as it engaged.

That would've been helpful information at the top of the dam!

Because...as I neared 30 miles per hour

- going downhill,
- I pressed the brake ever so lightly...
  - felt the jolt,
  - lost my balance,
  - and slammed on the street.

I slammed on my hip,

- slid along my back,
- and rolled into a ditch,
  - where I laid for the next half hour
  - while my friend rode out to the truck
  - to come pick me up and take me to the emergency room.

I couldn't walk. I couldn't put any weight on my left hip.

I had to be helped into a wheelchair by two young nurses at the hospital.

Here's a picture of me in all my glory. **SLIDE**

So, the ER doc came into the room and opened with,

- “Well sir, I had to look twice at your date of birth
- when I read, “Skateboard injury.”

They thought that I had broken my pelvis.

- Listen, when they’re worried about you breaking a hip...
- you might have aged out of skateboarding.

Thankfully I didn’t break it.

- I had a deep bone bruise on my pelvis,
- road rash from my hip to my shoulder,
- and I broke two ribs.

So, I got three solid days of resting actively.

- And for the next 6 weeks I was managing pain,
- and nursing that injury.

**BLANK SLIDE**

## TRANSITION

This was completely unexpected.

- I felt depressed.
- And I felt frustrated.
- I felt like I had wrecked my sabbatical.

But the Lord taught me something in this.

So, today’s theological topic we’re going to dig into is THE CHURCH.

- In an unexpected alteration in my sabbatical plans,
- God taught me something profound about the CHURCH.

So, let’s work through a few things, and I think it will be applicable to us.

## EXPLAIN: COMPLICATED

The church is one of those things that seems simple...  
but it can get kinda complicated quickly.

It's one of those things that I think we understand and grasp...  
until we really think about it.

- People say, *"I go to this church or that church,"*
  - and, *"I used to go to that church,*
  - *but now I go to this church."*
- And then sometimes you'll say, *"Man, church was good today,"*
  - or, *"church was so dang boring this morning."*
- Or sometimes you'll say to close friends,
  - *"You guys are my church!"*

So...

- is church a place,
- or an event,
- or an experience,
- or a group of people?

Well, the answer is, yes.

- The church is all those things.
- You see, the Bible says it's all those things.

## **SLIDE** ROMANS 16:3,5

[3] Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, [5] Greet also the church in their house.

So, the church is a group of believers gathered in a house.  
But in 1 Corinthians 1:2 it says this:

### **SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2**

[2] To the church of God that is in Corinth,

Ok, the church is believers in a house, but the church is also all the believers in a city. But then Acts 9:31 says:

### **SLIDE ACTS 9:31**

[31] So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

- So, the church is a group of believers in a house,
- but the church is also all the believers in a city,
- and the church is also all the believers in an area,
  - like all the believers in Littleton,
  - and Centennial,
  - and Parker,
  - and Aurora.
    - Ummm... maybe let's not include Aurora...
      - Kidding...I love Aurora...
    - I love LEAVING Aurora.

And then Ephesians 5.

## **SLIDE** EPHESIANS 5:25

[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Now that's different! This isn't a reference to any one specific church.

- So, the church is believers in a house,
- and the church is all believers in a city,
- and the church is all believers in a region,
- but the church is also all the believers everywhere in all of time.

So, yes, this thing is complex.

## **BLANK SLIDE**

### **EXPLAIN: AXIOMS**

Now, for years I have said things like,

- *"The church isn't a place, it's a people."*
- *"The church isn't come and see, it's go and do."*
- *"Just going to church doesn't make you a Christian..."*
  - *"Going to church makes you a Christian*
  - *as much as sticking your head in an oven*
  - *makes you a turkey."*

And, yes and amen to those statements.

- I know people who had been in church for years and years,
  - sometimes decades and decades...
- only to finally have their eyes opened and hearts softened
- to the reality of the Gospel.



So, yes, you can be a part of a church, and really miss Jesus.

- And, if this is your testimony, man, praise God.
- And if you've just kinda been playing church for a long time,
- all those things are true.
  - You're not a Christian because you come to church,
  - or because your parents raised you in the church,
  - or because you went to a Christian school,
  - or because you identify as aa Christian.

You are only a Christian if you've submitted to the saving work of Jesus Christ in your life.

## TRANSITION

But there is an opposite problem...

- a different problem...
  - yes, it is a problem that there are people in churches
  - who may not be genuine Christians...

But there are also now Christians...

who don't think that belonging to a church is important.

## EXPLAIN: LOCAL/UNIVERSAL

And so, I want to talk about the church, and its importance to the Christian.

Now, theologians have taken the church, and given us two categories.

- There is the LOCAL CHURCH,
- and there is the UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

## UNIVERSAL

So, if you met Pastor Tim Dunham this summer, our missions' partner in Thailand.

- Well, everyone from his church,
  - Chiang Mai Christian Fellowship,
- and everyone from Fathom Church,
- and everyone from every church in the world
  - actually, in all of time...
- that's the UNIVERSAL church.

Sometimes people call that the "capital C" church.

In the Apostles Creed the word they use is the catholic church.

- Catholic meaning UNIVERSAL church,
- not the Roman Catholic Church.

So, the UNIVERSAL church is all Christians everywhere in all of time.

This is what Paul talked about in Ephesians 5.

- **Jesus gave himself up for the church.**
- Not just for the church in Corinth.
- Or the church in Ephesus.
- Of the church right here.
- He gave himself up for the UNIVERSAL CHURCH.
  - All Christians everywhere in all of time.

So, if you are in Christ, you are a member of the UNIVERSAL church.

## LOCAL

But then there is the idea of the LOCAL church.

And the LOCAL church is:

- a particular people,
- in a particular place,
- at a particular time.

So, Fathom Church is a LOCAL church.

And Chiang Mai Christian Fellowship is a LOCAL church.

- The LOCAL church helps us live out our membership
- in the UNIVERSAL church.

It's where individual people and families

- choose to be accountable
- in our discipleship process
- to one another.

People will often point to Hebrews 10 to make a case for the Local Church

### **SLIDE HEBREWS 10:24–25**

[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

[25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but

encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing

near.

## **EXPLAIN: ONE ANOTHER**

This is the LOCAL church:

- stirring up one another
- loving one another
- meeting together
- encouraging one another

There are actually 59 commands in the New Testament that teach us how to relate to “one another”. This is lived out in the LOCAL church.

**BLANK SLIDE**

## **EXPLAIN: HISTORY**

Now, throughout most of human history,

- it was unbelievably hard for your average Christian,
  - in the LOCAL church,
- to connect with the UNIVERSAL church.

You might go to a conference or a retreat with other churches.

You might subscribe to a Christian publication or read a book.

But to participate in the UNIVERSAL church was actually quite tough.

And then if you think back more than, say, 100 years or so...

- maybe a Christian might make a pilgrimage
  - to a cathedral or something,
- but it was exceedingly rare and difficult.

And so almost all of your experience of church was LOCAL Church.

In fact, I talked to a church historian this week about this, and he said:

*“Historically, the ONLY way you participated in the UNIVERSAL church, was through the means of the LOCAL church.”*

## **EXPLAIN: MODERN HISTORY**

But recently,

- thanks to audio & video recording,
- and then the internet,
- and then social media,
- and then live streaming,
- and throw into that COVID...
  - forcing almost every single LOCAL church...
  - into the digital world.

Because of all those things,

- the content provided by the UNIVERSAL church
- is now at our fingertips.

Technology has made it easier than ever to connect with the UNIVERSAL church.

Now, what that has done is

- it has made it possible for you to FEEL like you can get,
  - from the UNIVERSAL church,
- some of the stuff that only the LOCAL church used to give you.

And man, COVID just sped this thing up like 30 years!

I mean, the stats are out there

- that people are leaving their LOCAL churches,
  - NOT THEIR FAITHS...
- but their LOCAL churches...

And now here's how they do church.

- you podcast a sermon every once in a while...
- And you follow your favorite preachers on Instagram...
- and you've got your Maverick City playlist on Spotify...
- and maybe if you're uber committed,
  - you'll actually stream a church on Sunday,
  - and throw a little praise hands emoji in the chat...
- and you don't give to a church,
  - but you sponsor 3 Compassion International kids...
- and you grab coffee with a couple of Christian friends monthly.

And that's cumulatively your "church"...

**But this is new! For the first time in human history**

- we have a huge number of UNIVERSAL church Christians,
- who have rejected the need of the LOCAL Church.

AND ALSO...

- many have become disillusioned with the LOCAL church
- because it isn't up to snuff with the content
- we are consuming from the UNIVERSAL church.

For the first time in history...

- Christians are questioning the need of the LOCAL church,
- and are trying to replace it with the UNIVERSAL church.

## CAVEAT

Now, I don't want to disparage on the UNIVERSAL church, and even on the benefits of the content that's out there for us.

These are unbelievable gifts of God's common grace for us.

- I listen to podcasts...
- I follow different ministries...
- I get my Maverick City on, too!

And we participate in this at Fathom...

- we stream
- and video
- and podcast
- and post on social media.

Like, I want us to take full advantage of the UNIVERSAL church!

I don't want you to hear me be disparaging on this.

## TRANSITION

But for the last three months:

- my family have been members of the UNIVERSAL church only.
- We haven't been around Fathom,
  - our LOCAL church.

And what I want to do with the rest of my time this morning...

- is to make a case for the necessity of the LOCAL church...
- by making three observations...
- from our experience on sabbatical.

## OBSERVATION 1: PRACTICES

First observation,

- the UNIVERSAL church cannot disciple you
  - as well as the LOCAL church
- when it comes to spiritual **SLIDE PRACTICES**

Listen, if you've been around for a while at Fathom, you know I'm a spiritual disciplines guy.

- I've preached on them.
- I believe in them.
- I practice them.
  - Reading,
  - and praying,
  - and giving,
  - and fasting,
  - and sabbathing,
- I do all the things...
- I am in on them!

In fact, I had big plans for my sabbatical.

- I had my disciplines ready.
- I had books to read for my heart.
- I really wanted God to deepen me and mature me.

And I don't know if it was my injury that kinda derailed my plans...

But man, it was a tough grind to practice my disciplines.

- It was WAY harder than I anticipated.



- And I'm, like, kinda good at these things!
- I'm, like, a professional Christian!
- But I'd get up to read my Bible and pray...
  - and it was just a battle,
- and honestly,
  - there were some days I just didn't do it.
- I didn't do my weekly fast.
- We didn't practice the sabbath.

And we made all kinds of excuses, but in reflecting Maryse and I realized

- that it's really hard to maintain spiritual disciplines,
  - our PRACTICES,
- outside of a LOCAL church.

**We need accountability. We need rhythm. We need connection.**

**And people get derailed when they get disconnected.**

Have you experienced this?

You miss church for a while, only to find yourself slipping?

I mean, it's hard enough to be disciplined when you're well connected.

But PRACTICES are so hard to follow through on

- when you aren't meaningfully connected
- to a particular people,
- in a particular place,
- at a particular time.

You need a LOCAL church

## OBSERVATION 2: PAIN

Second observation,

- the UNIVERSAL church cannot disciple you
  - as well as the LOCAL church
- when it comes to **SLIDE PAIN** in your life.

## ILLUSTRATION: LAKE SCARE

So right in the middle of my sabbatical,

- I got to take my dad on a special trip
- back to our family lake house
- in upstate New York
- where we visited every summer as a child.

My dad is in his late 70s

- and his Parkinson's is progressing,
- so, I really wanted to do something like a memory trip with him.

Well, we got there, and were just having a delightful time.

Here's a picture of us sitting on the dock. **SLIDE**

- Baptists, ignore the beer in his hand!

But right before the trip...

- Maryse started experiencing some pain in her back
  - and around her ribs
  - and into her chest.
- And so, on the second day I was in New York with Dad,
- She went to the doctor to get it checked out...

- And she called me after her appointment.
- Her doctor was very concerned
- and wanted her to go get a mammogram immediately.

So, she tells me this on the phone...while I'm on this dock!

- And we're immediately afraid.
- And we're anxious.
- And it's bringing up memories of previous medical scares.

And had we been in our normal rhythms of church,

- our D-group would be the first ones over to comfort her.
- The staff and elders would start praying.
- YOU would have been called into action!

Our LOCAL church is where we bear one another's burdens.

Our LOCAL church is where we bring our problems

- and find care,
- and counsel,
- and compassion.

But we didn't have you this summer...

Now, don't worry, it turned out that she's ok...

## **OBSERVATION 2**

But **SLIDE PAIN**

- like real life PAIN.

Which is coming for each and every one of us at some point...

- You may be in a season right now,
- or it may be around the next corner for you.

But pain is coming...

- and the universal church isn't able to disciple you
- through those situations and seasons.

Have you been there? Maybe you are there right now!

- A podcast isn't enough...
- A chat room isn't enough...
- Really, a Zoom call isn't enough in that PAIN.

You need a particular people, in a particular place, at a particular time.

You need a LOCAL church.

### **OBSERVATION 3: PEOPLE**

And finally, observation 3,

- the UNIVERSAL church cannot disciple you
  - as well as the LOCAL church
- when it comes to being your **SLIDE PEOPLE**

Your community. Your crew.

- So, we went to some churches in-person during sabbatical...
- and we did some online church during sabbatical.

And honestly, some of them were simply incredible.

- I mean, we heard some of the very best preaching in the world.
  - It made me slightly self-conscious
  - when Maryse would say,
  - "oh, that was a great sermon!"

- And we heard some of the very best worship teams.
  - Like professional musicians
  - and the best production out there.
- And we even experienced some of our friend's churches
  - that are legitimately great.
  - Great people,
  - great programs,
  - great services.

But after every single church experience we would always feel just meh.

- Like, it could be the very best in every category,
- and it left us a bit underwhelmed.

And upon reflecting, we realized that we really weren't attending church... at least for us.

- We were attending services. Some great services!
- But it wasn't church.

Why? Cause YOU weren't there.

- The music was great...
  - but it wasn't Fathom.
- The preaching was great...
  - Really, way better than you get from me...
  - But it wasn't with y'all.
- And even at our friend's churches,
  - They're our good friends...
- But they aren't week-in, week-out, spiritual community.
  - They weren't our PEOPLE.

See, the UNIVERSAL church isn't able to disciple you in community.

- It can only happen with people in your good and bad...
- in your highs and lows...
- in the whole of your everyday life.

Do you have this? Do you have a crew of people in a local church?

The UNIVERSAL church can't be your PEOPLE.

You need a LOCAL church for that.

## CONCLUSION **BLANK SLIDE WITH PADS**

So, when all is said and done...sabbatical was kinda lousy.

I mean, it wasn't...but what I do mean is:

- while I feel deeply rested from my work
  - as the pastor of this church,
- we learned just how deeply important the local church is...

Before we left we said, *"We're gonna miss you, church."*

- And jokingly you'd say, *"No you're not!"*
- But we really did miss you, church!

AND we learned that there isn't any other church for us than Fathom.

Some of you asked, *"Well, are you coming back?"*

- And that's because a lot of pastors go on sabbatical processing
  - Maybe God is moving us on into a new ministry.
  - Maybe to a new call,
  - or a new church.

Well, we come back from sabbatical knowing that Fathom is our church.

We've been to the best out there, and there is no other church for us.

## APPLICATION

And so, here's my first application to you from sabbatical.

- I want you to push all-in to the LOCAL church.
- If it's Fathom, man, let go do this together.

It's Fall Connect time, so let's go. On your chair you've got a sign-up sheet.

- Join a D-Group. Get you some people.
- Join a serve team. Use your gifts.
  - Fill those out and drop them in the offering box...
    - or get them to me or any of the staff.

Get connected!

- If you're newer to the church come to pastor's coffee next week. I'd love to meet you!

And if it's not Fathom, that's fine, but find a LOCAL church.

Push all-in there.

What I learned on Sabbatical is that...

- The UNIVERSAL church cannot disciple you
- as well as the LOCAL church.

Let's pray.

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – [fathomchurch.org/give](http://fathomchurch.org/give)
- PRAYER - [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.



## **RESOURCES USED:**

- Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology.
- Sayers, Mark. *Rebuilders Podcast: Listener Questions*.