



You might not be going to the best church

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In recent months, in addition to regularly attending my beloved Fort Garry EMC, I've visited Baptist, Alliance, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Mennonite worship services for various one-time events. I've then asked myself, am I at the best church?

In the past I've wandered far from my present church. I attended an Old Colony background church in Texas as a teen. As a young adult I wished my EMC church would just be charismatic for once. We worshipped for three years at Tenth Church, an Alliance congregation in Vancouver, and Kings Community Church, a small Baptist church-plant in Oakville. I had a phase where everything Anglican seemed better than what I had. Then I spent years living in the mind of a Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar. I wrote a book about what I learned from him.

And all the time I've asked, which is the best church for me? What church has the most biblical theology? The most transforming worship and liturgy? The most contagious evangelism? The most theologically profound architecture? The deepest philosophical foundation? The sweetest community between members? Who is just the least dysfunctional?

If I add all this up, Fort Garry EMC may not be the best church. And neither are the others. It might be as Stanley Hauerwas said about marriage; you always end up marrying the wrong person.

But perhaps "best" is not a Christian word when it comes to churches. The Bible shows no concern that Christians attend the best church. Nowhere does Paul say, "if you are not growing in your faith, it's probably because you are not at the best church."

The question might be not, is there a better church, but rather, is this still the body of Christ? Here is a basic principle: being involved in a certain church should have some connection to Christ being involved in that church. We can ask: Does Jesus still offer salvation to this church? Is the blood of Christ still offered to atone for the sins of this church? Does the Spirit still give the Scriptures to this church? If Jesus is "attending" this church, why wouldn't I? And to be clear, in Revelation 2:5 Jesus threatens to remove a church's lampstand. I suspect then Jesus would no longer attend.

I often think of my daughter here. She lives overseas in a city of several million people with very few Christians. She attends a church of about 30 people, which is almost the only such congregation available to her. She has little choice when it comes to church and would have sharp disagreements with some of its theology. But for her it's a gift that might not have been there.

There may be times to leave a church. Like in a rotten marriage, the human capacity to endure has limits. But being loyal to a congregation, even through difficult times, can be a powerful testimony to the faithfulness of God to his people. Can I show my congregation the long-suffering mercy and forgiveness that Christ has shown me?

Faithful God, what anointing of the Spirit's power, what transformation of my character, what firing of your love, would empower me to match your faithfulness to my church? Could my life in your body here become a sign of your big-heartedness? Make my love the face of your lovingkindness, which you promised endures to the thousandth generation. Amen.