

Our message today is: **The Image of the Church.**

Our main Scripture: Ephesians 5:31-32

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Images dominate our world these days, whether film or magazines. Don't they? There are so many images and sometimes the images are confusing or even alarming.

When it comes to images of the Church, however, the New Testament provides us six beautifully encouraging images that are certainly different, but have a wonderful thread running through them. Let's take a brief look at those and then discuss each in turn.

The Church is seen as: 1) the body of Christ; 2) His building or temple; 3) His household or family; 4) His flock; 5) a plant or vine; and finally 6) the bride of Christ.

Whichever image grabs your attention most, each speaks of a relationship: and, what is the nature of this relationship? The Bible tells us that we are "in Him". And, what does that mean? Essentially that we are in union with Him and there is communion with Him. In simple terms it is love.

A closer look reveals some insights which might help us in our current journey. Let's pick up our biblical backpacks and make our way out on His adventure today. Let's go!

Let's look at the **first image** which is the **body** of Christ image. What does that image look like?



As members of one **body**, and just like the different parts of our body all join together to form one; we are members one of another; we are a part of the whole body.

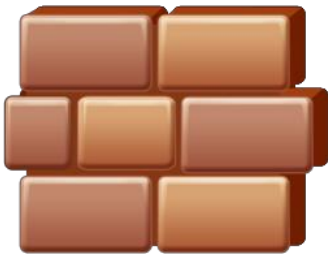
Here's how the apostle Paul put it in Romans 12:4-5

*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

What does this mean? It means there is connection (Rom 12:4-5) just like our own body is connected such as hand to arm, and arm to shoulder.

Sometimes it might feel that we are isolated or separated, but as the church, God is telling us that we are all connected – we are a part of each other.

Let's now look at the second image which is the image of a building or temple.



As His **building** or temple, we are joined together growing into a holy temple in the Lord. Temples are sacred places. And sacred places are places where nothing bad happens. So, together, we are growing day by day into something special... something sacred.

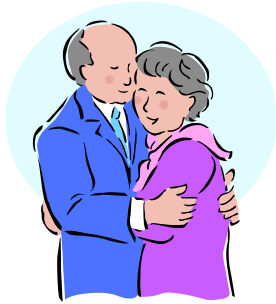
Here's how the apostle Paul put it in Ephesians 4:21-22

*the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

What does this mean? Not only are we growing into something special, something sacred; as we grow, we find there is a bond; a bond that holds us together (Eph 2:21-22). Just like bricks are bonded together, so are we in the church. Being together brings strength to that bond.

So, when you feel weak, know that the Lord is growing us stronger together.

Let's now look at the **third image** which is the image of a household or family.



Hopefully a family is a relationship where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and even self-control exists. Of course, there are some not-so-good families, but by and large families are good – especially when the members of the family all focus on the Lord.

Here's how Paul the apostle spoke of the household in Eph 2:19

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

It's hard not being in a good family. But God has made the family a place where love and joy can be nurtured. The church is a family. As such, the church welcomes all.

In days gone by, many households – rich households – had servants. Some households treated their servants like strangers, but some treated the servants with respect, with care, even with compassion.

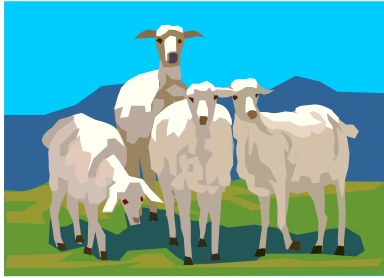
Sometimes we may be in a household but we feel like we are just servants. Here again the Bible helps us.

John put it this way in John 8:35-36

*The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

As His household or family, we are encouraged that even though we were strangers, or even servants, we become something special; in His church we are now fellow citizens with saints (as mentioned in Eph 2:19), and as servants we have something better in God's family; we are now set free (as seen in John 8:35-36). That's a special gift in God's church – He gives us freedom; freedom to be the people He wants us to be.

Let's now look at the **fourth image** which is the image of the church being the flock.



As His flock, we have the good Shepherd who daily looks after us. He cares for us so much He even lays down His life for us (John 10:14-16).

Here's how John put it in John 10:14-16

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

This is a good image, isn't it. Yes, we are sheep, but we also have a shepherd; someone who is always on the lookout for our well-being; someone who protects us; someone who feeds and guides us. Amen for being sheep!

Let's now look at the **fifth image** which is the image of the church being the vine.



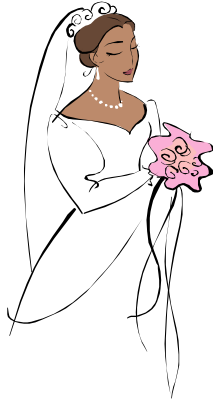
If we've not seen one, we all know what a vine looks like and what the fruit look like. The vine produces grapes; sweet, succulent delicious fruit.

Here's how John put it in John 15:5

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

As a plant or vine, through Him we can bear much good fruit. We can be productive! We can make a difference in our communities. As we work alongside Him and as we are connected to Him (as seen in John 15:5) good fruit comes. When the church is working well the church is productive; and when it is productive – good fruit comes!

Let's now look at the **sixth and final image** which is the image of the church being the bride of Christ.



For half the population – the men – that might seem somewhat odd. But it's not odd to think that in a marriage there is love, devotion and a strength of affection that is really joyful when all is working well.

Here's what Paul has to say about this imagery in Ephesians 5:31-32.

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Paul is connecting the imagery of marriage to how we can view the church. So, as the bride of Christ, we have a union with Him (as seen in the Ephesians 5:31-32) and it is a spiritual union.

Which image of the six do you see reflects you most at this time?

1) the body; 2) building or temple; 3) household or family; 4) flock; 5) a plant or vine; and/or 6) the bride of Christ.

And, how about this church as a group? Which image best reflects Kailua Christian Church?

As we conclude our time today, you may have noticed that I placed the images in a certain order.

I purposefully placed them in a particular sequence. I hope you see the progressing connections from “individual”, to “building”, to “household”, to “servanthood under loving authority”, to “fruitful connection”, and finally to “union”

Why is the imagery of the union of marriage placed last and therefore most significant?

I think this is the one image that is more important than all the others.

See, it’s one thing to be an individual member of a group or part of a building, even part of a household, but quite another that Christ picks us out to be His bride. This means we are more than sheep – even when we act like it – and more than grapes – even when we complain or whine (pun intended). We are His bride!

To be married from God’s view is to move from isolation to true intimacy.

The danger of being isolated is that we become kings of our own kingdom. And God doesn’t want that, hence the imagery of being His bride to help us.

Christ proclaims His love to us.

I don’t want to be just a building block, although I am;  
I don’t want to be just a branch on the vine, although I am. Rather I desire to be His bride.

Every Easter we are reminded that because Christ died for us we have new life. As Paul said, *“We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”* (Eph 5:30), and because of this *“shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh”* (Eph 5:31).

Why does he connect these two verses? According to Paul, the parallels are profound. *“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (Eph 5:32).

Paul is showing us that we have an attachment to Him and a strength of affection greater than any union that exists in earthly marriages, or indeed any response to the other images of the church.

We are His bride, we are His church. In a real sense, we are in a dress rehearsal here on earth for our eternal marriage with Him in heaven. As Christians, even if you are not married, we are all rehearsing for our future marriage with Christ.

So, here’s a pastoral application. Hopefully your Pastor and leaders tell you to read the Bible. Good, they should! But do we read the Bible because that’s just what we are supposed to do? Imagine, if you read your loved one’s letters just because that was what you were supposed to do. Rather, we can read the Bible because His words are love letters to us. They express His

love. So we can read it differently. Instead of it being a kind of manual, the Bible can be more about Him and Him relating to us with words of love, care and guidance.

One of my students said to me a long time ago: *"I got to see [Scripture] as something so much more than a guidebook, a textbook, a manual... I now see it as God's love letter to us all."* What a great way to continue as we get ready for our relationship in heaven.

I hope today that you've been reminded of how the Lord sees the church. And the church is you!

You are the body; you are joined with others – you are not alone.

You are His temple; you are special and there is a bond between you that is always there.

You are His household – you are a family.

You are the flock – and He is your shepherd, guiding and caring, protecting and nurturing you every day.

You are the branches of the vine. Every day, as you work alongside Him, good fruit will come.

You are meaningful, you are important.

And, finally, you are His beloved! He loves you. He loves you more than any husband or wife love each other. He loves you so much; He has died for you. He died for you so that you may live. That's how much He loves you. He puts your needs above His own. That's what good spouses do.

So, again, today, how do you see yourself in His church and how do you see Kailua Christian Church?

Take heart if you feel lonely. Take heart if you don't feel so special. Remember that you are in His family. Remember that He will guide you every day. And, as you follow Him and love Him, He'll help you become productive and be meaningful in life. And never forget, that He loves you more than any spouse loves their beloved!

Be well, stay in Him! You are His Church!