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## *Why I Need Church*

"I know the time is not completely right," my friends ask me, "but, will people ever come back to Church? Have some lost the practice, the habit, the need?"

Of course, my answer is a bit biased. But it is biased by awareness of my own life, and biased by my own needs and choices. "Yes," I say, "We need Church, we need Bible, maybe now more than ever."

First, I need the Bible. I capitalize the word, "Bible," because it's really a title we give to a whole set of books, sixty-six of them, which were all written over a period of at least eight hundred years. The word, "Bible," actually means "library;" it's a library of individual books.

And, wow, does the Bible tell a series of stories! We enter a different world when we read the Bible. In our present world, like you, I read a lot about misinformation, disinformation, and even "information disorder;" and I have to remind myself that we are what we see. We are what we read. We are what we hear. I need to be part of something different from what is being shouted out at me in much of contemporary and popular media! I need to read some healthier things!

I need to enter the world of the Bible. We enter a different world when we enter the world of the Bible. It is a series of stories, a wonderfully long and complicated series of stories, stories that interpret each other, even correct each other. Stories about the history of our human encounter with each other, and with the Holy. In the Bible, we learn about triumph and tragedy, gain and loss, praise and lament – and all these phenomena can be holy. In the Bible, we learn about men and women coming to realize who they really are, and coming to realize who God is.

The Bible is not a rule book. Sure, of course, it has commandments in it, commandments that are worthwhile; but those commandments are not always immediately applicable to every moral challenge we face today. Rather, the Bible speaks about character, the character that is crafted by time. The stories of the Bible form character.

Our Christian Church story begins with the Bible story: its rhythm and maturity are to shape the Church. After Jesus Christ, our history takes twists and turns and ups and downs. In Church, we hear our history described, and we see our tradition rehearsed. Finally, it is our liturgy – what we call our common worship together—that provides a teaching shape to our prayers and sermons and hymns and music. The way we pray, in giving and receiving, listening and speaking, shapes the way we are meant to live throughout the rest of the week. We don't just hear and watch at Church; we participate, together, in what is being said and sung and lived out.

I believe that the world needs the stories of the Bible. I believe the world needs the healthy Christian church, for just these kinds of counter-narratives to the narratives we hear elsewhere. The Church is not just another political party, as good as some of those parties are. The Church is not just another social club, as good as some of those clubs are. The Church is not just another therapy group, or playground, or school, as good as some of those great institutions are, too. The Church is not just another video or performance, as good as some of those videos and performances are. Rather, the Church is our participation in a life that is outside, different from, the life we see around us these days.

Yes, we are going to come back to Church, when the time is right, and each in our own time. We are going to find community Church again –not just video Church, and not just "talking-at-you" Church—because nothing else will be able to satisfy us the way that healthy community does. Over time, the healthy community that is Christian Church, centered in Jesus, inspired by the Spirit, informed by the Bible, with people facing each other openly, in grace and truth, has no comparison. Well, I do know that other healthy religious traditions compare favorably – those who share the rhythms of forgiveness and grace, honest self-knowledge, and honest divine-

knowledge, and openness to new life! But my tradition is the Christian one. For me, there is no comparison to the healthy Christian Church. Yes, we are going to come back to Church!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Rev. Sam Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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