

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Marks of the church

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

What are marks of the church? Our Catechism states that the church is one, holy, universal and apostolic (6.4), it is where salvation is made accessible to humanity, and where we praise and worship God (6), and it has a dual nature - visible and invisible (6.3). This is where the believers come in. God's work in and through the church become evident in the lives of believers, and through them, people around us experience God, the gospel, and His desire to save all.

This month, each sermon will expound on **marks of the church**, and how we as believers embody them to the world.

August 2: The church has a dual nature; it is **visible and invisible**. In this sermon, we will come to understand how we experience God's presence and work in the church, and how the effects make the invisible, visible in our lives.

August 9: On the second Sunday, will explore 2 Corinthians 5, and Apostle Paul's explanation of apostolicity - both **the message and the messenger**.

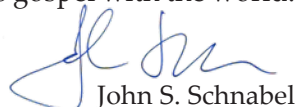
August 16: On the third Sunday, the sermon will expand our view of **oneness** in the church - that which embraces diversity, unites us in Christ, and leads to unity of mission.

August 23: The fourth Sunday will take us to the Ten Commandments, exploring how **mutual honor** creates healthy families and healthy Christian communities.

August 30: The fifth Sunday will offer an extended definition of the Fifth Commandment, one that includes **compassion and protection** as remedies to the dangers to life.

August midweek: In the midweek sermon, Jesus' encouragement to those with little **faith** motivates us to see that God can work and transform, even in our weaknesses.

The church is not a location or building, but rather it is us, the believers, who align our lives with Christ and share His gospel with the world.



John S. Schnabel

AUGUST 2026

August 2

Marks of the church
Visible & Invisible

August 9

Marks of the church
The message and the messenger

August 16

Marks of the church
Oneness

August 23

Marks of the church
Mutual honor

August 30

Marks of the church
Compassion &
Protection

August midweek

Marks of the church
Faith

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 2

Where are we in the Bible?

Habakkuk is a book of questions. The prophet enters into a dialogue with God, where he voices his complaints and discomfort with the current conditions. Although, God does not give a straight answer, He calls Habakkuk to recognize that He is present with His people (2:20) and that He is working, although sometimes in unexpected ways (1:5). In both His responses, God calls Habakkuk to have faith and trust in Him (2:4 and 3:17-19).

We experience the presence and work of God in the church. Everything that the church is, and everything on which it is based, has its origin in the person and deed of Jesus Christ, who both is and brings salvation (Catechism 6.2.2). He laid the foundation in His teachings, life, death, resurrection and ascension which provide the foundation and establishment of the gospel, the apostle ministry, and the sacraments. The church of Christ is invisible and unfathomable and can only be grasped in faith (Catechism 6.3), yet the effects of God's presence and actions in the church are visible and knowable.

Summary:

Like Habakkuk, who dared to question God yet was overwhelmed by His majesty, we too can have this experience in the church. It is a place where we can bring our questions and doubts, encounter God in awe and stillness, and gain a deeper understanding of who He is, what He has done, and how He is present among us. The church, founded and governed by Christ, is where He is present and at work, leading believers toward eternal life. As we come to Him with humility, trust, faith in His gospel, and the grace of the sacraments, we see Him working in our lives and walk our path of faith with renewed confidence and purpose.

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Visible & Invisible

Habakkuk 2:20

But the Lord is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth keep silence
before Him.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Habakkuk 2:18-20, 3:17-19

Catechism

2.4.3, 2.4.4, 6.2.2, 6.3

Discussion Questions

Habakkuk brought honest questions and frustrations to God. What does his example teach us about bringing our own doubts and struggles before God?

God is present and **God is working** in the church. Where do you most clearly see evidence of God's presence and work in the life of the church today?

God's word, sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit are places where the invisible God becomes visible through His actions. How have these means of grace strengthened your faith?

We are encouraged to "turn off" distractions and "turn toward" God's presence. What distractions make it difficult for you to "keep silence before the Lord"? How can you intentionally create space for stillness and worship?

Habakkuk moved from questioning God to worshiping Him—not because every question was answered, but because he came to trust God's presence and His work. What would it look like for you to take one step this week from questioning toward deeper trust in God?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 9

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The message and the messenger

Where are we in the Bible?

In 2 Corinthians, Paul uses the word “ministry” to defend and describe his being an apostle - the ministry of “the new covenant” (3:6). In chapter 3, he creates dichotomies between “ministries” of Spirit and death (3:6-7), and of righteousness and condemnation (3:8-9) for emphasis. Overall, Paul is attempting to explain apostolicity to the community in Corinth, who have misunderstood the nature of his ministry. In chapter 5, he gets to the heart of this apostolic ministry - it is a ministry of reconciliation, which requires both a message and a messenger. It is a ministry that reveals the true nature of God’s love, showing who God truly is based on His desire to reconcile with mankind by equipping the apostles to work towards this reconciliation through the Holy Spirit.

At the beginning of chapter 5 (5:1-8), Paul speaks to the future, and to the eternal destiny of the believer that comes from the assurance of Christ’s resurrection. In light of this future glory, and future judgement (5:10), Paul highlights the aim of all believers - to be well-pleasing to the Lord (5:9). In the subsequent verses, specifically starting at verse 18, he focuses on something that is not only well-pleasing to the Lord, but also necessary for the believer to have their eternal destiny realized—to be reconciled to God (5:18-20). As an ambassador for Christ, Paul makes it clear that this was the message and he was the messenger.

Summary:

All those who follow Christ have been reconciled to God in Christ through the sacraments, yet because of our ongoing sin, we must continually be reconciled to Him through repentance and grace. Rather than trusting our own standards of goodness or attempting to “do-it-yourself,” we are called to hear and respond to the message proclaimed by Christ’s ambassadors—a message that exposes our need for grace, calls us to depart from evil, and leads to genuine repentance. Because Christ sent apostles to proclaim salvation, and the apostolic message continues in His Church today, the ministry of reconciliation remains essential for leading believers toward eternal life.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Catechism

2.4.3, 6.4.1.4, 6.4.2.3

Discussion Questions

Paul describes the apostles’ work as a **“ministry of reconciliation.”** What does reconciliation with God mean, and why is it central to the gospel?

Reconciliation requires both **a message and a messenger**. Why do you think God chose to work through human messengers rather than simply speaking to individuals directly?

We leave Holy Communion as reconcilers. How can reconciliation become a defining characteristic of our congregation and our relationships?

There is no “do-it-yourself” path to reconciliation. How does remaining connected to God’s Word, the sacraments, and the ministry of the Church help you continue growing in Christ?

How has God’s grace changed the way you think about your own failures and shortcomings?

Paul’s appeal, “Be reconciled to God,” is deeply personal. Is there an area of your life where you sense God inviting you into deeper repentance or reconciliation?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 16

Where are we in the Bible?

In John 17:20–21, we are in the final hours before Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. Having celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus offers what is often called His High Priestly prayer, documented in all of John 17. He first prays for Himself and His disciples and then turns His attention to all future believers. Jesus looks beyond the eleven apostles and prays for those who will come to faith through their testimony, including us today. Maintaining unity is part of the responsibility of the apostle ministry; as our verse points out, it is through their “word” that we come to believe in Christ. Jesus’ desire that His followers “all may be one,” reflects the perfect unity shared between the Father and the Son. This unity is not merely organizational but spiritual, rooted in God’s love and truth. Through this oneness, Jesus says, the world will recognize that He was sent by the Father.

Summary:

Oneness begins in the heart of the individual. It grows in the interpersonal relationships of the family, reveals itself in the congregation, and defines the life of the church. Rooted in Christ, oneness embraces diversity, unites all believers, and leads to a shared mission of bearing witness to the gospel. As Jesus prayed not only for His first disciples but for all who would believe through their message, He revealed that the unity of the church is both a gift from God and a calling for His people, serving as the defining mark of the one church of Christ.

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Oneness

John 17:20-21 (excerpt)

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
John 17

Catechism
6.4.1.1, 8.2.20, 13.1.3

Discussion Questions

Oneness embraces diversity rather than uniformity. How can a church celebrate different gifts, personalities, cultures, and perspectives while remaining united in Christ?

The Chief Apostle described the church as a “colorful flower meadow.” How does this image help us understand Christian unity?

The mission of the church includes unity in proclamation, love, hope, knowledge of God, and identity in Christ. Which of these areas do you think the church demonstrates well, and which could be strengthened?

As you draw closer to Christ, how have you seen your relationships with other believers change?

Unity begins in individual hearts before it is seen in families, congregations, and the Church. As you reflect on Jesus’ prayer in John 17, what is one area of your own heart where Christ is inviting you to become a stronger instrument of His oneness and love?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 23

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Mutual honor

Where are we in the Bible?

In the Ten Commandments, the command to honor shifts the focus from our relationship with God, to our relationships with each other. The reality of what is expressed in the first few commands, our love of God, is expressed through our communal love of our neighbor, which starts in the family. A person created out of a loving parental relationship is the foundational way God informs us of love as a force for growth, development, and stability. Mutual love in the family teaches us the lesson if its power outside the family. Honoring our parents gives us a deeper realization of their love for us. Love cannot be fully understood, but honor looks at the long term effects of their care on our lives.

We can also understand this command as referring to the moral weight of unchosen relationships. It's easy to love the people we choose to love - our friends. When it comes to unchosen relationships, for some, it might be easy to love their parents and siblings. But for others, who have felt unloved and unwanted, or have suffered violence or harm from familial hands, this command poses a great challenge. Many fathers and mothers walk through circumstances, burdens, and struggles that are often beyond their control. Their children may never fully see or understand these hidden trials, yet the effects can shape the course of a family's life for years to come. We must be careful about a society that easily judges the past, without empathizing with those in the past. Honor does not require us to deny human weakness or pretend our parents were perfect. Rather, it invites us to recognize with gratitude the place God gave them in our lives, leaving judgment in His hands, and praying for the strength to reconcile and heal. In doing so, we obey the commandment not merely with our words, but with hearts marked by reverence for the life we have received.

Summary:

When there is mutual understanding, care, dignity, and gratitude, the family relationship provides strength throughout life and blossoms into a foretaste of the perfect relationships we will enjoy with God and our neighbor in the new creation. The command to honor is fulfilled through the gift of mutual honor, as parents and children alike reflect Christ through love, respect, and God-pleasing conduct, always recognizing that obedience to God comes first. As we care for one another, these qualities shape the church into a community where people truly belong and encounter Christ's love through His people.

Exodus 20:12 (excerpt)

Honor your father and your mother.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Exodus 20:1-17

Catechism
5.3.5

Discussion Questions

Family relationships are often complicated. How can someone honor their parents while also recognizing real hurt, brokenness, or unhealthy behavior?

Jesus' relationship with Mary illustrates mutual honor through understanding, care, and dignity. Which of these qualities do you think is most needed in families and churches today? Why?

How can parents, grandparents, mentors, and other caregivers make it easier for younger generations to honor them through their own example and conduct?

When you think about your parents or those who raised you, what qualities are you most grateful for? How have they shaped who you are today?

Do your words and actions consistently communicate that others are valued and respected? What might need to change?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 30

Where are we in the Bible?

The Fifth Commandment, *"You shall not murder,"* begins with the understanding that God Himself is the source and protector of life. All life comes from Him, and therefore He desires that life be honored and preserved. In contrast, Jesus described the devil as "a murderer from the beginning" because Satan destroys what God creates. He destroyed the unity between God and humanity, between people themselves, and even between mankind and creation. This contrast reveals that God's kingdom is a kingdom of life, while the enemy seeks division, destruction, and death.

Jesus deepened the meaning of the Fifth Commandment during the Sermon on the Mount. He taught that murder begins long before a violent act occurs outwardly. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment."* The book of 1 John later adds that whoever hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15). These teachings reveal that anger and hatred are spiritually connected to murder because destructive actions first develop within the heart. Even when we are right in the wrong way, we can cause damage that is hard to remedy. Jesus was warning that sinful attitudes act like seeds that eventually produce a harvest. This verse gives us orientation to do the work of examining our own hearts.

Summary:

The Fifth Commandment reaches beyond physical murder to the attitudes of the heart. It warns against anger, hatred, revenge, bitterness, harmful speech, and selfishness, while calling believers to protect life by practicing forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation, and active love. As Jesus teaches, violence begins in the heart, so we are called to respect, protect, and promote life. When we fail, we can humbly return to God, trusting that His mercy is greater than our imperfection.

NOTE: *"Nobody can claim to govern or to rule a country in the name of Jesus Christ. No one can pretend to go to war on behalf of Jesus Christ. No one. No one can use the gospel of Jesus Christ to justify violence and hatred... you cannot justify war, violence, hatred with the gospel."*

Chief Apostle Schneider, Pentecost 2026

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Compassion & Protection

Exodus 20:13

You shall not murder.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Matthew 21-22

1 John 3:15

Catechism

5.2.1-3

Discussion Questions

Jesus teaches that the Fifth Commandment addresses not only outward actions but also the attitudes of the heart. Why do you think He places such importance on anger, hatred, and resentment?

Abraham, Joseph, David, and the Good Samaritan each demonstrate different ways of protecting life. Which example speaks to you most, and why?

Martin Luther summarized this commandment by saying we should "help and assist" our neighbor in every need. How does this positive understanding expand our view of "You shall not murder"?

Have your words ever unintentionally wounded someone? Conversely, has someone else's words deeply affected you? What did you learn from those experiences?

Jesus moves the Fifth Commandment from our hands to our hearts. As you reflect this week, ask yourself: **"Am I merely avoiding harm, or am I actively becoming a person who brings life, healing, mercy, and peace wherever Christ has placed me?"**

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR AUGUST 26/27

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Faith

Where are we in the Bible?

Luke 17:5–6 occurs within Jesus' teaching on discipleship, particularly concerning forgiveness and humble service. After hearing that they must repeatedly forgive a repentant brother, the apostles feel overwhelmed and ask Jesus to increase their faith. His response teaches that discipleship is sustained not by human strength but by trusting dependence on God.

The mustard seed appears elsewhere in Jesus' teachings as a symbol of both the kingdom's growth and the power of faith. Throughout Scripture, God works through what seems small and weak, whether Gideon's army, David before Goliath, a widow's oil, or a few loaves and fish. The consistent biblical pattern is that God's power is revealed through those who recognize their dependence upon Him.

Summary:

The message of Luke 17:5–6 is that God does not require extraordinary faith from His disciples; He calls them to place even their smallest measure of faith in His unlimited power. Faith is trust in God, not human achievement, and as believers rely on His strength rather than their own, deeply rooted obstacles can be overcome, relationships restored, and fear replaced with confident hope. Even seemingly small acts of faith become instruments of God's transforming power, bringing change in suffering, relationships, and the lives of those who trust Him.

Luke 17:5–6

"And the Apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea," and it would obey you.'"

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Luke 17:5–6

Catechism

1.4

Discussion Questions

The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith, but Jesus pointed them toward trusting God rather than possessing "more" faith. What do you think He wanted them to understand?

What is the "deeply rooted mulberry tree" in your life right now—a fear, habit, relationship, or burden that feels difficult to overcome?

The immediate context of this passage is forgiveness. Why do you think Jesus connects faith with the ability to forgive and restore relationships?

Can you recall a time when God worked powerfully through what felt like your weakness or limited faith? What did that experience teach you?

What is one practical way you can exercise even "mustard-seed faith" this week by trusting God in an area where you have previously relied on yourself?