

“I’ve Been Coming Here on Sundays”

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[Psalm 150; Ephesians 2:11-22 and Hebrews 13:8](#)

Our second testament reading this morning is from Ephesians 2:11-22 and Hebrews 13:8, before I read those verses, I’d like to set the tone for our Ephesians passage, so as we prepare to lean in & listen...to God’s word for us this day...let us do so by beginning with a word of prayer:

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Come as the fire and burn,

Come as the wind and cleanse,

Come as the light and reveal,

Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:

That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,

for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

This letter of Ephesians can be broken into two halves – chapters 1-3 & chapters 4-6 –

- chapters 1-3 are doctrinal in nature – they describe for us what our faith is made up of, what is our faith foundation;
- chapters 4-6 are didactic – they are educational in nature...they instruct us about how to live out our faith.

This describes a normal ordering of life – whereby one posits, “Practice follows theory.”

- In essence, we learn things in order that we might know things – so that what we know influences how we will grow and how we go into the world bearing witness of something to those who watch us.

This highlights for us that this morning’s text, which we’ll get to, Ephesians 2: 11-22, falls into the doctrinal part of Ephesians – it’s a bit of formal teaching about what makes up our faith.

Ephesians 2 is also split into two parts,

- 1-10 and 11-22.
- These two sections talk about life in two parts and are focused namely, as is the bulk of Ephesians, on bridging the distance between two groups – Jews and Gentiles.

- The two parts of life described in Ephesians 2 can be thought of as – “before” and “after.”

The “before” is described in Ephesians 2: 1-10 and discusses what a life without God looks like. The “after” section is Ephesians 2: 11-22 and talks about the change God has effected in redeeming from sin and uniting what was divided.

In both sections, there is an important and beloved two letter Greek word *de* which translates into English’s three letter word *but* – it is called beloved because it marks the pivot point in the text where things begin leaning away from negative and toward positive.

In the before section (Ephesians 2:1-10), just after the writer has described what life is like without God, the turning point occurs, we read in verses 4 &5,
“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved...”

In verses 8ff, we read,
“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

That last part is pivotally poignant – not just to this section but also to the transition into this morning’s text –

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

It speaks in a way about something I heard from a motivational speaker for middle school you, Michael Pritchard, as he spoke at a 7th Grade Leadership Conference, Pritchard recounted a statement made by a young grade school student, “The good that you do comes back to you.”

This verse from Ephesians hits a deeper vein of gold in that it allows us – followers of Jesus – to see “The good that people do comes from God.”

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

The good that we do comes because of having been awakened to the purpose of life by the grace of God at work in our lives.

- We are grateful because of what God has done for us in and through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ.
- We are grateful therefore we live in gratitude.

And this affects how we live in community – which finally brings us to this morning’s text – Ephesians 2: 11-22 & Hebrews 13:8 – Listen, now, to God’s word for us today...

Scripture (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

Ephesians 2:11-22 “One in Christ”

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth,^[a] called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—
¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ **But** now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both to God in one body^[b] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[c] ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone;^[d] ²¹ in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually^[e] into a dwelling place for God.

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

This is the word of the Lord. / **Thanks be to God.**

Ephesians 2:11-22 reminds us – those who were far off – those who were aliens – those who once were cut off from God by their choice – those who once were strangers are now – in Christ – brought near to one another – made to be citizens & members of God’s household with full access to God.

The language here speaks of having the right to freely approach a King.

The Ephesian audience would recall the secular understanding that this implies one has been given the privilege to be admitted into the presence of the Emperor – the purpose being to press the Emperor for a request ... to secure some type of benefit.

The Ephesian culture also knew that to enter the presence of Emperor required being admitted into an impressive building.

Imperial favor was often associated by the building of a temple to Augustus.

He’d notice your town if you had a temple with his name on it – the bigger the better!

When Ephesians talks – “the holy temple of the Lord” – it is a temple which is in the process of being built up.

“...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

You know as well as I do – the church is more than the building – the church is more than the programs – the church is more than a mission statement – they’re important...don’t get me wrong...without a place to gather / without programs to foster faith formation / without mission vision it’s easy to become like the co-pilot who got on the intercom and declared to the passengers, “I’ve got good news and bad news. We’re making great time...and...we’re lost.”

The church is the people inside – the ones whose blood, sweat and tears...whose prayers, pulse and cooperation with God’s Holy Spirit commit themselves to following God’s lead into a yet to be written future.

The good news of the gospel is lifted up and carried forward in this world by the people who commit themselves to taking the gospel forward – and yet – to make it happen – to carry it forward – to see this thing that God is doing to the end – one needs structure – one needs programs – one needs vision – one needs opportunities to grow & learn in the faith...

The disciples had three years with Jesus – learning what it meant to live according to the one who called himself “The way, The truth and The life.” The disciples were steeped in that faith formation and then were sent out to carry the message forward – they were sent out to be the church – to be “a holy temple in the Lord; in whom [they were being] built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (cf. Eph. 2:22).

And that’s why stewardship is important.

To get the good news out we need a place to house the ministries to which we are called AND we need a way to fund those ministries.

We need a place to grow in faith in order that we might go from this place and tell those around us about this good news message which proclaims *peace to those who were far off and peace to those who are near.*

Our Ephesians passage suggests for us today that it is in community where we will see God’s presence most visibly in this world.

- The church is that community which exists because of God’s new act of creation – a creation whose reality and reason for being is focused on its exalted head – Jesus the Christ.
- The purpose of this community is to bear witness to God’s grace by sharing God’s love with a hurting world – a world that knows all too well the pain of being kept out of something by hostile dividing walls.

We have a good news message to declare – one afforded us “not because of anything we’ve done” rather because of what God has done through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ – the One who is the same *yesterday, today, and forever*.

This community – *Everybody’s Church* – First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, MI has been around since 1834 – it has had a sole purpose to be a living witness to Jesus the Christ at work in this community and world.

This community – *Everybody’s Church* – First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, MI has been served faithfully through the generations by those who have come before us – those who are here with us now – and those who will come after us.

This community – *Everybody’s Church* – First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, MI’s uniting focus has been Jesus the Christ –

- who is the same yesterday, today and forever!
- and who calls us to be “a holy temple in the Lord” – “in whom we are being built spiritually into God’s dwelling place.”

There is a poem, the title of which is the same title as today’s message, “I’ve Been Coming Here on Sundays.” I found it in the gift shop of St. Machar’s Cathedral, which is a part of The Church of Scotland and stands upon a site which has housed a worshipping community since 580 AD, the current building, in which I worshipped whilst studying at The University of Aberdeen in Aberdeen, Scotland dates from the 1100s.

The poem says a lot, listen as I read it what could be described as my best British/Scottish/Irish accent [Read Poem]...

I’ve Been Coming Here On Sundays

(by Barbara Robinson)

I’ve been coming here on Sundays for seventy year or so.

“Twas here that I was Christened and ‘tis here I’ll want to go.

Now I know you all gets vexed about changes in belief.

Well frills on top don’t matter if you’re comfy underneath.

I never lets it bother if I’m High or Low or what,

While I’ve got me Ten Commandments

I shan’t go wrong a lot.

Now, I likes old-fashioned prayer book

And they like A.S.B.¹,

¹ A.S.B. is the Alternative Service Book which is similar to our Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*.

And they can have what pleases them,
And I'll read what suits me,
And half the hymns we sing these days
I've never heard before,
But I can stand and listen, and perhaps I'll learn some more.

All these guitars and instruments -
It's no more than they had
Afore they put the organ in,
When my Granddad was a lad,
And I don't suppose God'll worry
He wouldn't make a fuss,
As long all the singing's mean't for Him and not for us.

We've had clergy coming straight from college,
Full of summat new,
From incense on the altar to posters in the pew.
And I lets 'em all get on with it, 'cos all these fashions pass,
And you'll still do the flowers, me dears,
And I'll still clean the brass

I got this seat I always have, no draughts and nice and near,
So I can hear the organ and see the vicar clear,
And I tells God what's been happening,
And what a week I've had,
And I thanks Him for the good times,
And He helps me through the bad,
'Cos all that really matters, as far as I can see,
Is that I, down here, remembers Him,
And he remembers me.

All that really matters, is that we down here remember God and recall with gratitude every day
that God remembers us.

And that we take that good news message with us into this world, for we are called to be "a
holy temple in the Lord" – "in whom we are being built spiritually into God's dwelling place."

To God be the glory, now and forevermore.

Alleluia & Amen.