

Sermon 02-22-2026
Centered on Christ – Rev. Markus Wegenast
Ephesians 2:19-22

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;^[h] 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^[i] into a dwelling place for God.

1)

Our church has a clear direction. We are here with a purpose and for a purpose – our purpose is defined in the Bible: Make disciples of all people, baptize them, teach them. Jesus himself gave this direction. He gave it with a promise: He said he would be with us always to the end of the age.

Every local church in this world has this very same mission & vision, given by Jesus himself. What a privilege it is for us as a local church to be part of this mission.

While the mission of each church is the same, the way we go about fulfilling it varies from church to church. Each local congregation, regardless of denomination, size, age or affluence is made up by people with different gifts and strength.

That's the reason why most churches have their own unique vision and value statements based on who they are.

Mission

Vision

Values

Several years ago, the leadership of our church came together to put our vision and values into words. It wasn't a quick process, the leaders and pastors took their time – it started when Pastor Jen was still here and got finalized in Pastor Meshach's time. But it wasn't just the leaders and the pastors who defined our churches mission and vision – everyone was invited to be part of this process and quite a few of you participated.

Maybe you remember that last year in October we did a series on our vision statement. Anyone remember that? Do you happen to remember them?

Our vision is: To be a family of believers being transformed by Christ, dedicated to growing spiritually, living generously and loving courageously.

This season of Lent I want to explore our church's value statements with you. There are five of them so each Sunday in Lent we will explore one of our values and here they are:

Church of the Saviour:

- **Centers on Christ**
- **Welcomes all people**
- **Respects & celebrates diverse opinions**
- **Embodies love, grace & generosity**
- **Forges enriching relationships**

I will be gone on the 5th Sunday and we will have Pastor Bruce preach about “forges enriching relationships” – this will also be Scout Sunday (?). The next Sunday will be Palm Sunday and we will focus on the Palm Sunday theme.

Maybe you noticed something new in our church if you came in through the main entrance. We have put up a plaque that beautifully displays our vision and value statements.

Pic of sign

I don't want this to get overly complicated. There is a lot that can be said about the intricate difference between a vision and a value. Just in Brief: a vision is something that we aspire to achieve, we are not quite there yet but on the way. Values are a description of the culture that defines us. I'm excited to explore with you how these 5 values define the culture of COS.

2)

Today we start with our first value statement:

Church of the Saviour centers on Christ

This of course should not come as a surprising value statement. It is such a common theme throughout the ages that a church centers on the one who started the church: Jesus Christ. He did not come into the world with the intention to start a new religion, he came to reveal God to us in fullness and after his death and resurrection he commissioned his followers to share this with all the world.

We can find countless references, poems, and hymns that emphasize that Christ is our center.

Would you please open your hymn book to page 368? “My hope is built” is a traditional Christian hymn. On the bottom you can see that it's pretty old, almost 200 years. Check out the refrain, can we read it together?

“On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.”

The melody is just as majestic as the words.

How do you feel about this? Does it come across a bit exclusionary to you? All other ground is sinking sand? Is this hymn suggesting that all other philosophies, religions, and priorities are nothing compared to Christ the solid rock?

What about a neighbor family who happens to be from Africa and are practicing Muslims, are they doomed to build their lives on a shaky foundation?

When we at COS say that our first value is to center on Christ, do we have this exclusionary approach as a congregation?

Maybe you feel right now I dug us into something that wasn't necessary to go into. "Come on, Pastor Markus, why are you making this harder than it needs to be?"

Hard is not always bad – every once in a while, it's good when we challenge ourselves and ask hard questions because it makes us grow. I really believe that.

At the same time it's not necessary to escalate a situation. There are many ways in which it is good to take a little bit of the heat out of a situation to not make it unnecessarily inflammatory.

I'm not saying this to be wishy washy and lukewarm; it is with a burning but friendly zeal that I say:

Yes, we are a church, and as a church and as members of a church we don't have any other ground than Christ. Without Christ there would be no reason whatsoever for us to be church.

It's not necessary for me personally to tell my Muslim neighbor or my atheist friends that they built their lives on quicksand – but it is my privilege and my necessity to say that for me as a member of Christ's church, I don't have any other foundation than the one Christ has laid.

Take a look at the subtitle for our first value statement:

Christ is at the center of our worship, study, service & stewardship.

Without Christ as center, foundation and cornerstone worship would be meaningless, stewardship would be without divine purpose, study would just be intellectual advancement, and service would quickly become self-serving instead of being sacrificial as demonstrated by Christ.

...

Christ is our foundation – what a beautiful foundation!

Think about COS as a congregation for a moment. Think about the many foundations that have been laid in its history:

Picture 1

- Our first foundation was not laid here on Pfeiffer Rd but in the old school building of Montgomery Elementary School in 1957.

Picture 2

- It was in 1960 that the first physical foundation has been laid here on 8005 Pfeiffer Rd

Picture 3

- In 1973 our church proudly and joyfully added a new fancy sanctuary that houses our youth and offices today.

Picture 4

- A fellowship hall and classrooms were added in the 80s.

Picture 5

- And in 1997 we built our current sanctuary where we worship today.

Picture 6

- Is it ok if I say that the curse of the pandemic in 2020 forced us to lay a completely new foundation not with bricks and mortar but with technology as we added online worship that helps us today connect with well over 100 worshippers on any given Sunday, some of them living across state and even country lines.

All these foundations have one thing in common: They are not foundations on their own – they are just means by which our real foundation, Christ, is being built upon for without Christ there would never have been a movement in 1957 to come up with an idea to start a new methodist church in Montgomery.

3)

A moment ago, I was wondering out loud if having Christ as the sole foundation is exclusionary. Our powerful Bible text from Ephesians today speaks into this wondering powerfully:

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, Ephesians 2:19

The Apostle Paul is using strong language here to help us understand what a beautiful honor it is to be part of Christ's church. He is sticking with deep scriptural roots that tell us that the way God started to write a story with us people is by inviting us back into a fellowship that we had lost.

I don't know why God almighty went the route of calling Abraham out from all the people to start a story with him and his offspring. I don't know why God would not start a story with all people simultaneously – all I know is that this is how God did it and when the time was right, he sent Jesus to grow his invitation beyond the physical line of offspring of Abraham.

Look how bluntly Paul is describing this situation: he says that people who weren't biological offspring of Abraham were strangers. When Christ became the new foundation for his church it changed something significant about our status: Now we non-kids of Abraham are no longer strangers but citizens – in deed invited to be family members of God's household.

This passage from holy scripture is close to my heart because I experience this passage through my own biography.

When I moved to the US in 2004, I soon found out that my move came with a fancy title: I was a resident alien – here on a religious workers visa. Now, you need to understand – it may be odd for an American to hear that someone is called an alien, but for a German it is double odd – because the only reason most Germans know the word alien is from the movie.

“That's what I am now?” – I was a bit offended but also a bit intrigued by that new title. All my life I was an innocent German citizen and all of the sudden I became an alien!

After a few years of living here I applied for a green card to change my status from resident alien to permanent resident. That sounds a lot better – doesn't it?

At times it can still feel a bit alienating to not be a citizen – like when I can't participate in elections even though I pay taxes – but I understand that this is my own choosing. What I really want to get at with telling you about this is that to me it has become so meaningful that the church which has Christ at its center is a different organization. Here I am a citizen. Even while I was still an alien resident for the first 3-ish years of living here in the US – it was so abundantly clear that when it comes to the church there is no such distinction. In the church, no matter of which country our citizenship comes from its center which is Christ.

Of course there are many laws and regulations that the church as an organization has to follow – in Wisconsin we had a lot of pastors that came in from abroad and needed to go through a complicated legal process – that all makes sense – but there is never an ounce of doubt that as members of the church there is only one status that prevails: Citizenship! Membership in the household of God. Because in the church we are

...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord – Ephesians 2:20f

In days in which immigration politics are as challenging as they have ever been – I find today's Bible passage to be extremely powerful. My home country, Germany, of which I am a legal citizen struggles with its immigration laws and enforcement just as much as we do here in the US. It is a huge, difficult humanitarian subject to figure out: How can a country be a safe haven for refugees and how can it maintain safety for all living there – for there are more refugees in this world than any nation can handle.

At church of the saviour, we are built upon the foundation of what has gone before. The people that were inspired by Christ to start COS, the generations that have laid many more foundations on the one foundation that holds it all together: Christ.

You have a place in this – you are here for a purpose – you are a member of God's family and God invites you to live out your calling in the context of a foundation that has been laid a long time before we were born into this world.

Do you feel you belong? Do you feel that your citizenship in Christ is calling you to move and act in this world differently. One of the great dangers that I see in our current world is that the forces of polarization want to steer us away from the center that Christ is. Christ does not polarize us in a way that make us enemies of each other, Christ polarizes us to have our bias in him and his love for the world – the whole world including and especially the people we have such a hard time getting along with.

You are called to take your stand not on a fiery political side that is promoted by one side or the other, by one media outlet or the other, by one influencer or the other, but you are called to stand on Christ who is the corner stone and who calls you to love your God and to love your neighbor and to love – yes, love even your enemy.

That is a foundation you don't find in many places – that is a foundation that we as a local church want to cling to and I want to see together with you how much, much good will come out of it. Amen.