

Have you ever been a part of something and, in the middle of it, said, “Why are we even doing this?” I told you last week that we moved, and it wouldn’t surprise you to know that, in the middle of it all, I asked that question. When we get busy doing, it’s easy to forget why we are doing it in the first place.

Over the last six weeks we have been looking at the New Testament images of the Church in order to understand what Jesus meant when he said, “I will build my church.” We spent the first three weeks considering the “who” of the Church, understanding who we are as the family of God and the body of Christ. We saw our identity and our responsibility to each other through that. The last three weeks we turned our focus outward and looked at the “what” of the Church, the worldly impact we are supposed to have as salt and light, laborers sent out into the harvest, and as ambassadors for Christ. But at this point in the series, it would be reasonable for us to ask, “Why are we even doing this in the first place?” That’s what I want to answer these last two weeks of the series. I want to end with the “why”, because we can be in here and out there doing for God, but if we miss the why, it will be meaningless. At the end of Ephesians 2, Paul gives us the “why”.

**[Ephesians 2:21-22] <sup>21</sup> In (Christ) the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

By using a clear reference to the image of God’s temple in Jerusalem, Paul helps us understand why God is building his Church. In the Old Testament, the temple in Jerusalem was the epicenter of God’s presence and activity in the world. It was Israel’s spiritual gathering place. It was the place of sacrifices and worship. It was there where God’s Word and will were declared. His power, through the Shekinah Glory, went out. And it was there where God dwelled among and met with his people.

You see, from the beginning, God has longed to be with his people. He walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve. After the fall, we read of a man named Enoch, who walked with God, and his great-grandson Noah did the same. Sometime later, God called a man named Abram and said he’d make a great nation through him, a people for his own. Through Abram’s descendants came the nation of Israel, of whom God said, **“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”** And while that people rebelled and ultimately God judged them by removing his presence (see Ezekiel), God’s heart did not change. He still wanted to be with his people. In the Gospel of John, as he writes about the coming of Jesus, he says **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** God entered creation through Jesus to dwell among us and save us. After he was crucified and resurrected, he ascended to heaven. But before he did, he promised the Holy Spirit to come upon all believers of Jesus individually and unite a new people together called the Church. It is in this people where God now dwells.

So we can talk Sunday after Sunday about what we should be doing as the Church, and we will. But any sermon series about the Church must include the “why” of it all. Because, at the heart of the Gospel, is not a what or a how, it’s a who. At the heart of the Gospel is a loving, personal, relational God who desires to be intimately connected with us and gave his only begotten Son to

accomplish that. We are saved by Jesus Christ, so that we can be with him now, which we'll look at this morning, and so that we can be with him for eternity, which we'll look at next week. How does God fulfill his "why"? How does he accomplish it? How does he make it possible to be with him?

**Where God dwells, peace reigns.** When sin entered the world, not only was man now hostile to God, the effects of sin damaged relationships with each other as well. Within the first two generations of creation, a husband and wife were at conflict with God and one another, and the rivalry between their sons ended in murder. Any hope of peace was up to God. Jesus not only reconciled us to God but reconciled us to each other.

**[Ephesians 2:13-16] <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.**

For centuries, enmity existed between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is addressing that because he's writing to predominantly Gentile church in Ephesus. Gentiles had been excluded from God's relationship with, and promises for, Israel through the Law. Even the temple had a wall that separated the areas for Jews and Gentiles. Out of that legal division grew animosity between the two groups. The pagan Gentiles, who had no hope and openly rejected God, hated Israel. Israel's purpose was to be a light in a dark world and point the nations to the one true God. Unfortunately, they failed in their mission and, rather than humbly serving humanity, grew proud as God's chosen people, disobeyed, and looked down on the other nations. A great social, cultural, and spiritual divide existed between the two groups.

Jesus came to heal that divide. He is both the substance and the source of that peace. His work on the cross fulfilled the Law that called Israel to be separate and created a new body made up of both Jews and Gentiles. God's plan of redemption announced through Abraham always included all nations. His intent was to create one unified, harmonious people to dwell among. And if you were alive during the time of the early church, you would have marveled to see these formerly hostile groups worshipping together and living in harmony.

But Jesus' work went beyond the barrier that legitimately existed in the Law. Jesus also broke down the barrier that existed because of pride and hostility. The beauty of the cross is that it levels the playing field. It reminds us we have no standing on our own. In fact, just before this passage is a passage many of us are familiar with.

**[Ephesians 2:8-9] <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** All of us are equally desperate for the cross. We are all equally helpless and hopeless without Jesus, so none of us have any room to boast. And if we have no room to boast, we have no grounds to hold on to animosity, ill will, superiority, or unforgiveness towards someone else.

Today, the American church does not wrestle with the divide of Jew and Gentile, but there are plenty of other issues that can and do divide us. You know the list: race, politics, class, age, etc. And the root cause is the same. **Differences become division when viewed through the lens of our pride.** And where there is division, there can be no peace. There can be no unity.

I am thrilled to say I believe Fellowship Dallas models this peace and unity well. We are a church who welcomes any and all to become a part of our family. We don't lose our differences. We don't ignore what makes each of us unique. We celebrate it while remembering that we have been made one in Christ. There is unity in our diversity. There is peace among us, as Jesus has made possible. This doesn't happen by accident, though. We must work to preserve it.

About this election: If our hope rests in the results of what happens next Tuesday, we need to reconsider our view of Jesus and his Church. Elections are important, and we all should exercise the incredible privilege we have to vote because there is plenty at stake. But the animosity around politics these days is evil, toxic, and the antithesis of how the Church is supposed to live. The more we identify ourselves **primarily** among the different tribes we are a part of, rather than our shared identity in Christ, the more the unity of the church is threatened.

Etiquette says you're not supposed to talk about matters of politics and faith. Well, I disagree. How about in this place of faith, we talk about politics with each other, see what God's Word has to say about the issues, learn with our brothers and sisters, and if we still disagree, do it respectfully, **and remember that something far more important and far more powerful unites us, and that is Jesus Christ.** Rather than being against someone who has a different political view than you, be for them as someone who was as desperate as you were, and is as blessed as you are now, to be saved by grace.

A fractured Church fails in its mission to show the heart of the Gospel: reconciliation. But a unified Church is a beacon of hope. It shows the world the peace it can have with each other, and it's a picture of the peace they can have with God. And maybe, just maybe, like when the world saw Jews and Gentiles living in harmony, the world will be wowed when they see Republicans and Democrats at peace with one other because they share a love for the Prince of Peace. That together we would point the world not to our preferred candidate, but to our precious Christ.

That reconciliation is only possible, though, because God has also reconciled us to himself. **[Ephesians 2:16-18] <sup>16</sup> and (he) might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.<sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.**

If we are not at peace with God, any peace with each other will be short-lived. If we're not at peace with God, the root problem of our hostility hasn't been taken care of. That means we're not reconciled to each other or to God. We spent a lot of time talking about reconciliation last week. Reconciliation brings together two things that were separated, out of balance, at odds or enmity with each other. Our sin separated us from God, there was nothing we could do about it, so God sent Jesus to reconcile us back to himself. A relationship that was hostile is no longer.

Peace with God means access to God. Jesus has passed the background check on our behalf and we are allowed in. We can be in his presence individually, and we can be in his presence collectively. God wants to be with us and God has made a way for us to do so. It is nothing we earn. It is a gift that we must simply accept by faith. Jesus is our peace. Jesus made peace. Jesus preached peace.

**Where peace reigns, God's Church is built.** Those at peace with God and each other become the building blocks of God's temple. They are assembled by the work of his Spirit, and the result is his Church. Paul tells us of the church's foundation, formation, and function.

**[Ephesians 2:19-22] <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**

God's temple is no longer a building in which he resides but instead a people whom he inhabits. It is formed not by using stones dug from the earth but instead by living stones born of the Holy Spirit. Those at peace with God have become part of God's family and are being built into God's Church.

The Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. You might say they were the original draft class of the Church and the initial gifted individuals given to the Church. They received God's revelation, declared his truth, and spread the Gospel. Jesus himself is called the cornerstone. A cornerstone is used in construction. It is placed first and controls the unity, harmony, and structure of the building. All other stones are aligned with this stone, so the role it plays is primary. My youngest loves a challenge and is intent on seeing how many dishes he can carry from the table to the sink at the end of dinner. While I cheer him on and tell him he's got room for a few more, Martha has other concerns. She makes sure the bottom dish, the cornerstone, is sizable and solid so the rest of the stack is secure. That's what Jesus does for us.

The Church's formation is the work of the Spirit. The phrase "being joined together" means each stone is skillfully shaped and formed for a perfect fit in relation to cornerstone and other stones. We are not thrown together haphazardly. I'm always in awe of the craftsmanship of Legos. They are perfect and fit exactly like they are supposed to. You get an off brand, you may have to put in a little extra effort to get those pieces to fit. Not so with Legos. The Spirit makes each of us a perfect fit. We are chosen, refined, developed, gifted, and placed with his intentionality so that every part fulfills the purpose for which it is made.

The Church's function is God's "why". The why of the Church is the why of the temple. It's where God meets with his people. It's where he dwells. The Church doesn't just come to a place. The Church gathers as a people. It's a family reunion called by our Heavenly Father, made possible by the Son, and hosted by the Holy Spirit. We come together to offer spiritual sacrifices and worship him. We're not just singing songs. We're praising our God who is in our midst. We declare his Word and will. We're not just reading a book. We're listening to our God speak to us. Why the Church? Because God wants to be with his people.

So in honor of the “why”, we’re going to take communion. When we celebrate Communion, we celebrate that which was shed to bring peace between us and God bring peace between us and each other. It is a shared meal where we remember Jesus Christ and look forward to his return. It is a picture of the unity we now have with one another and the unity we have with God, and it’s a picture of how God longs to dwell with his people.

Pass out elements.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus shared a meal with his closest friends. **[Luke 22:15]** <sup>15</sup> **And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”** He knew he would dwell for only a few hours more, and he wanted to dwell among his people before he went to the cross. In that moment we see God’s heart to do whatever was necessary to reconcile us to himself so that we could be his people forever.

At the Lord’s Table, we are all equals. Our presence and participation are a confession that we are utterly dependent on the grace of God, that the body and blood of Jesus are our only means of hope. There can be no hostility because we all come with nothing to offer. There is no room to boast. By participating, we are united as one as we proclaim Jesus Christ together.

Jesus’ body broken for you so that our relationship with God and each other could be made whole.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”