

Radical Reassembly

Ephesians 2:14-22

We continue our series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians titled 'Growing Together.' Why Ephesians? When we started we read this quote: "We immerse ourselves in Ephesians to acquire a clean, uncluttered imagination of the ways and means by which the Holy Spirit forms *church* out of just such lives as ours." That sums it up pretty well.

I've been telling the story of those 33 miners stuck in a hole in Chile. They've been there for 60 days now, trapped 2300 feet underground, and it looks as though they won't be rescued for another month. Remember that when the miners were found they'd already organized themselves into teams—they were sharing regular rations, they sleep and exercise and keep watch over each other in shifts. Most of this wasn't part of their standard procedures. Most of this was handed down informally from grandfather to father to son—they've gone through so many tragic mining events that they've learned how to be ready—how to take care of each other and *live*.

That's how we want to be here in this church.

What we learn from Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a lot like what we can learn from those miners in Chile. Their skill and commitment, their willingness to stay together and trust each other—none of that happened by accident. It worked because they studied and remembered and practiced what to do when disasters strike. When that mine caved in no one had to tell them that they needed to look out for one another—to take care of each other. They'd been getting ready all along.

That's what we're going to do.

As we work our way through Ephesians we're going to be honest about life and faith and the world, and we're going to see how this important book of the Bible helps us become more a more mature church—a church family that's ready for anything. Too often churches forget that part of our job is to help people express and share and live their faith beyond the walls of this place—in the other 167 hours of the week.

I want to take that part of the church's job more seriously.

Ephesians is going to provide road map for us as we grow individually and as a church family. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus has a lot to say about life and faith and how to live in a world that doesn't always understand who we are. Today's passage is an important part of that.

Read 2:14-22

Some things to know about this text:

Look how active Jesus is in this passage. There are nine verbs to describe all that God has done through Jesus to grow us into a faithful church. Jesus is our peace, he made us

one, he broke down the wall of hostility, he abolished the law, he created a new humanity, he made peace, he reconciled, he put hostility to death, and he proclaimed peace. Whatever else we learn from this passage about the way God interacts with us, we should at least be aware that he is active, that he's busy, that he isn't just sitting back and watching what his people do without getting involved.

Paul says that Christ 'himself is our peace.' Last year we spent a lot of time talking about the idea of shalom. In the Old Testament shalom has a broad range of meanings. It can refer to the communal well-being of the nation, or physical health, or a sense of contentedness or happiness in relationships. It often describes a state of completion and wholeness. One writer called it 'the webbing together of God, humans and creation in justice, fulfillment and delight.' But most often it gets translated simply as 'peace.'

When Paul calls Jesus our peace, he's saying that in his life and ministry, through his teachings and healings, in his death and resurrection—through the work of Christ we've been offered a chance to experience the shalom we were meant to know—to live the life we were meant to live.

Paul says as much in the next lines: 'Christ's purpose was to create one person out of two—unity out of division—by reconciling us through his cross. That's the core of the good news of the gospel right there—that whatever separates us from God or from each other or from the earth—that everything that divides us is somehow healed and reconciled through Jesus Christ.

But we're still kept apart by what Paul calls hostility—the 'dividing wall of hostility.' Now that phrase in itself packs a pretty good punch. The dividing wall of hostility could describe all kinds of things—racial hatreds, the grudges that keep some countries fighting forever or at least ready to go to war. It could describe the way that different kinds of abuse make trusting another person seem impossible. A dividing wall of hostility could describe the way we interact with anyone who's wounded us in some way.

Paul's readers might have thought of those things, but more likely they knew about the wall in the Temple in Jerusalem that was meant to separate Jews from Gentiles. The Temple was the holiest place in the world for Jews. It represented their history, their present faithfulness, and also their hope for a Messiah and a restored kingdom. The Temple was one place where even the Romans didn't intrude, and where the priests and leaders were allowed to make the rules.

On the wall in the Temple separating Jews from Gentiles there was an inscription that read:

"Let no foreigner enter within the partition and enclosure surrounding the temple. Whoever is arrested will himself be responsible for his death which will [soon] follow"

This was known as the 'dividing wall of hostility.' This is what was torn down through the ministry of Jesus the Messiah.

Listen to how Eugene Peterson translated this in *The Message*:

“Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to you insiders. He treated us as equals, and [in doing] so made us equals. Through his we both share the same Spirit, and have equal access to the Father.”

The point of all this is that we’ve been reassembled. We come to Christ with every single kind of brokenness—we come in pieces, but we’ve been put back together. It’s a radical form or reassembly—of being reconciled to God and to each other in ways that we didn’t think were possible—ways that aren’t humanly possible. We come in pieces, but we go with the peace that only Christ can offer.

What does all of this mean for us as we grow together as a church family?

First, part of growing together means focusing on what God has done for us individually. Whatever we’ve done that separated us from God—whatever sins we’ve committed or guilt that we carried—whatever brokenness we bring to him, he promises to heal and cleanse and restore. When people talk about coming to faith, this is what they mean: accepting the forgiveness and restoration that God offers us through Jesus Christ.

Second, growing together means just that: growing as a community that loves and sharpens and serves each other in peace and unity. Notice I said unity here and not uniformity. There’s a pretty important difference between those two. We don’t have to do all of this in the same way, by the same set pattern. But we are called to work and grow together as people who have been taught and empowered to live in community by God’s Holy Spirit.

And finally, growing together means that we take how we’ve been restored and made into a community—we take the way God has worked in our lives and we turn it outward, sharing it with our neighbors, strangers on the street, and the rest of the world. Growing together as a church community means going into those places where walls of hostility still separate and oppress people, and working to tear those walls down.

We come to Communion with the same expectations that brought faithful Jews to the Temple in Jerusalem. We come remembering what God has done in our lives through Jesus the Messiah, and how our lives have been transformed and restored to the shalom we were made for. We also come with our eyes open to what God is doing today—to the blessings we receive and the work we’re called to do together as his church.

And finally, we come because God has made promises to us. We come as people of hope—not some pie-in-the-sky dreaming about clouds and wings and harps, but a real-world hope based on the promises Jesus made to come back and make all things new. In Communion we share the past, present and future of our faith. We invite you to come to the Table this morning.