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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 28, 2016
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Proverbs 4:14-23, Matthew 10:16-22

Hymns: 466; 764; 460; 377:10

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 2:19-22

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Knowing your Place.

That expression might be used against someone if they are proud and behaving in a manner that is not fitting for their station in life. It might also be used with someone who is not acquainted with what their role should be in a certain company or activity. Even on a sports team one needs to know their place, their position, their function if there are going to contribute to the team as a whole. One might feel like a fish out of water until another individual

comes along and orientates someone to their surroundings. Today we are going to use this expression to better understand our place with the Lord, and it will be used in more ways than one as the Spirit leads us in --

THEME: Knowing Our Place in God's Church.

It is only --

I. By God's Grace We Have a Place in the God's Church.

Paul is addressing the words of our text to a congregation that was largely gentile, made up of Greeks. Throughout the Old Testament the gentiles were not allowed a place in the temple, in which the believers worshiped. Even when they had come to know the only true God of Israel, they had to stay behind the wall. They were put in their place, separated from the chosen people of God. A wall that separated the gentiles from the Jews was symbolic in nature but had a powerful message. The Lord did not want His chosen people mixing with the pagan world who worshiped all sorts of false gods. There was a wall of separation which the Lord had constructed with the ceremonial law that presented the message that those on the outside didn't know God. So Paul referenced this in the verses preceding our text.

Ephesians 2:12 "At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from 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."

We hear a lot these days about the need for a wall to secure our nation, to keep undocumented and dangerous aliens out of our country. As great a wall as that would need to be along our southern border, this wall was greater. It was erected by the Lord Himself. It was indeed a wall of separation that made it clear that the gentiles were not included in the chosen people of God. But then the One who built that wall tore that wall down. If you're old enough you might recall a famous line from a speech by President Ronald Reagan. Pointing at the Berlin wall that separated East Berlin from West Berlin he said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that

wall!” and it wasn’t long before that wall was torn down and the people of East Berlin and West Berlin were united.

One with far greater authority made sure the wall that kept out all gentiles from the kingdom of God was torn down. We are brought near by the blood of Christ. We are granted a place in the building by the grace of God in Christ. It is because of this grace of God in Christ that the precious opening words of our text are true.

Ephesians 2:19 “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Here we have declared by God a complete change of status for gentiles who believe. We who once were aliens “far off” have been brought near by the blood of Christ. We who once were without God and having no hope now have hope. What was it that made us so far off and distant from the Lord and His people? It was sin and unbelief. Only the powerful working of God the Holy Spirit could bring us near to God through faith in Christ Jesus. And that is what enacted that marvelous change in our status, in our place before the Lord. No longer strangers and foreigner, but citizens. You might say that we have been naturalized. We are every bit as much true and real citizens as anyone else, for all are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. We have a place in the building, not only a place to stand in the building, but we are now a part of the building. As citizens we are included in the kingdom of God, which is His Church, His Holy Temple.

Citizenship is something very special. Those who possess citizenship also possess certain rights. As citizens of the United States we have the right to a whole list of liberties that are not known in other countries. We have rights before the bar of justice if we ever stand accused of any crime. We have the right to petition the courts for protection. As citizens of the Kingdom of God we also have some very special and rare rights and privileges. We have the right to have an advocate represent us before the bar of **divine** justice, and this lawyer has never, ever lost a case. It is Jesus Christ who speaks on our behalf before the throne of God. We also have the privilege of bringing all our cares before the throne of grace knowing that God cares for us.

Citizenship also has responsibilities. As citizens of the Kingdom of God we are expected to live to the glory of Christ, our King, and to present His praises before the world. Even as we have a place in God's temple we are to be actively involved in supporting the Church's mission.

We are told that we have a place in the **household** of God, as **children** of God. Membership in the household of God is something even more special. It tells us that we are brothers and sisters with **Christ**. We are joint heirs with Christ. We shall inherit the treasures of heaven which Christ has secured for us by His death and resurrection. Through faith we are included as members of God's family. These are wonderful gifts that keep us secure in God's household.

As members of God's family we have brothers and sisters to care about. We need to be involved in this family. It just isn't right to behave like a stranger when you have been so graciously brought into a family. But too many do. Too many, even among us, fail to remember that our church family is as important, even more important than our earthly family. We need to support this family with our prayers, with our offerings, with our involvement.

At this point in our text the Apostle Paul uses a picture of a building to communicate to us the significance of our place in the Church. This building is --

II. Built Upon the Firm Foundation of the True Faith

Lest we think that this is something haphazard or unstable the Spirit presents us with the base upon which we find ourselves.

Ephesians 2:20 "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,"

This reference to the apostles and prophets is directing our attention to the authors of Holy Scripture and so to all the Bible. In this expression we are reminded that the Bible (all of it!) is given to us for our edification, for the building up of our faith. It is **not** the

mish mash of human writing that evolved over the centuries as one man revised and then added to the writings of another man as some propose. “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God**” (2 Timothy 3:16), and most certainly **Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit** (2 Peter 1:21). What we have here in our text is a double assurance. First the writings of the Old Testament are the Word of God, and the writings of the Apostles that we have in the New Testament are likewise the inspired Word of God. The Cornerstone of all the Bible is Jesus Christ. The cornerstone gives direction to the construction of a building so that everything is square and secure and neatly tied together. Jesus Christ gives direction and unity to all Holy Scripture. The base of our faith is this true and certain Word of God that presents from beginning to end God’s plan for our salvation in Jesus Christ.

This is our authority for faith and life, not the shifting sands of human wisdom, or public opinion. Our place in life rests upon a coherent, consistent and eternal truth; that God sent forth His Son into this world that we might live through Him.

God knows your place as you are --

III. Being Fit in Your Place in the Temple of God.

Paul wrote --

Ephesians 2:21-22 “in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

These last verses of our text complete the picture, not only in giving us a view of the building as a whole, but in how we come to know our place in this building. When God called us to faith He placed us in His Church, in the walls of His holy temple. The building of God’s holy temple, His Christian Church both in heaven and on earth continues as an ongoing building project of God until the end of time. Each day as the gospel is proclaimed and hearts are moved to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit working through that gospel more stones are shaped and fitted into place in God’s holy temple.

Even as the building process is ongoing, so Paul communicates to us that the Lord’s work with each of us is ongoing as well, as long

as we are on this earth, the Lord is tending to us as an important part of His building, His holy temple. It is not enough that He called us to faith and placed us in this holy temple. We are “**kept (in our place) by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” (1 Peter 1:5).

So now you know what it means to be **put in your place**. While we deserve the ultimate of put downs of being cast into the outer darkness of hell, that is not the way of God’s grace. He has found a place for you in His holy temple. We proceed through life with confidence that we belong in the temple of God. You should see yourself as the living stone that you are, and recognize that **the Lord has put you in your place in His Church** for a reason. You are part of this glorious temple that is the whole Christian Church on earth. The Lord has shaped you, and He has placed you in the right spot so that you might add strength to His Church by your service to Him who ransomed you from sin and death with Holy precious blood. Realize your place and serve the Lord with gladness, glorifying His name “**who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**” (1 Peter 2:9).

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)