

The Church is One House

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Well, I think we set a record this morning for the two shortest readings that we've ever heard on a Sunday morning. Remember those days when we were reading through 1 and 2 Samuel?

And this morning our first lesson was three verses long and our second lesson was five verses long. That's eight in total. And nevertheless, we are a church that's gathered by God, built by Jesus Christ, through whom we have our peace and access to the Father.

And as such, we understand what that means by looking at the scriptures. And so we do turn to Ephesians chapter 2, now on page 976.

As we continue on in this series about the church, this past week I did a search on Google about the church. It was directed that way by an article that I actually read about the church.

And if you've used Google before, you know that if you put in two or three words, then after that you'll be given four kind of options that are associated with those words or phrases.

[1 : 15] And they're apparently the most popular ones that have come up after people have searched those words that you've put in. Does that make sense or did I just confuse you?

Understand, you put the words in and then there's a bar where you're given four kind of options that are ranked, that are associated with that word or phrase. So it goes like this. So I searched, why are Anglicans?

And this is what came up. This is what popularly was given. Why are Anglicans so liberal? It's the first most popular. Second one, converting to Catholicism.

Third, important. And the fourth one was wrong. That's what people are inquiring about the church. Actually, the wrong was actually the one on Friday.

On Saturday, it was displaced by orders invalid. So I don't know what that says about me or any of us who wear collars, but nevertheless. So I went on to the Catholics.

[2 : 22] And this is what I discovered. Why are Catholics? This is really kind of peculiar. I don't know about this. I didn't know this. Called left footers. Against abortion. The third one I won't repeat.

And the fourth one was so arrogant. If you insert the word so, why are Catholics so? The first thing that comes up, strict. The third one, sorry, the second one is nice.

The third, guilty. And the fourth, I know we covet this one maybe. Awesome. It's interesting what people are searching about this church. Two more, one on evangelicals and then one finally on the church.

Brace yourself now. Why are evangelicals so? Annoying, one. Crazy, two. Hateful, three. And stupid, four.

Sorry. The final one that I want to look at here today, though, is why is the church? Listen to this. This is what people are inquiring about. The church first.

[3 : 25] Why is the church? You'd never guess this. I know that none of you have probably ever searched this. Of Scientology so bad. Seriously.

Number two, against stem cell research. Three. I like three and four now. But I'm just reporting to you. Three, important. Four.

You'd never guess this like the first one now, after these first three. The fourth one is holy. People are searching. Why is the church holy?

Incredible, isn't it? Well, I want to look at the church today from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. And this is what I think he's saying in these five verses that we read there.

And that is that the church is an entity. It's a unit. It's an organism. It's not only built by our Lord. It is actually unique with an aspect of peace to it.

[4 : 22] It has a unique peace to it. A peace with him, our Lord, and expresses that peace as a nation, a household, and as a temple. So we have this kind of unique peace that's achieved for us by the Lord.

And that's how we express it. As a nation. As a household. As a temple. And the key verse today is this one that's verse number 18. It reads, For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

Now if you read before that in the section verses 11 to 17, you find something more about what it is that Jesus has done to achieve that peace on our behalf because we couldn't actually do that.

It's really quite graphic and important to read. But one of the things that we find out about Jesus in those verses is that Jesus is our peace. That Jesus makes peace.

And that Jesus preached peace. Verses 12, 14, and 17 preached peace twice. And that's why then when we come to this verse 4, Through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

[5 : 25] I think that what goes before that is actually telling us that the access that we're given to the Father comes through the Son and in the Spirit. And it's because the Trinity's actually achieved peace for us through Jesus Christ.

That's the only way we can even think about having access to the Father. And I hope you want to have access to the Father. It hadn't always been that. It wasn't always that way. But now it is. And that's what Paul's saying us.

And this verse, For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father, is absolutely critical. It's one that's worth memorizing, I think. I used to think that verses 9 and 11 of chapter 2 were the key verses.

But after preparing this, I thought, No, this really short, easy-to-memorize verse is absolutely critical. And memorizing, just so you know, isn't for children. It's for us adults as well.

And it's an easy one to memorize. In fact, why don't we just say that together? You ready? You're used to this, I know, because you're Anglicans. It would be great if we were at, Why do Anglicans memorize Scripture?

[6 : 31] For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. Great, right? Easy to memorize. Verses 9 and 11 are about us being saved not by works, but for works.

But then we get to this, which is a great kind of synthesis to what the gospel is about as the Trinity actually brings us to the Father by Jesus Christ and in the Spirit.

Absolutely critical. So, what about that? We probably read that through really quickly, and you maybe didn't even actually notice that it was said before we got on to the other aspects of the church that follow in the other four verses.

But I think that's worth looking at that we have access to the Father through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. And this word access is really curious, isn't it?

Because we actually sing a hymn, don't we? Immortal, invisible, God only wise. In light. Inaccessible. But it doesn't stop there, does it?

[7 : 32] Hid from our eyes. So, maybe he is hid from our eyes and inaccessible to our sight, but that doesn't actually mean that the Father is inaccessible to us. Right here it says that the Father is accessible through the Son and in the Spirit.

And it's the Trinity that achieves that for us and gives us peace with God through the mystery of the Trinity. Absolutely critical to our faith and how we practice our faith in the world in which we live.

And when we gather here, and one of the reasons that we gather here is so that we have access to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. That's what the Trinity actually does for us. It's a mystery, but it's a reality.

A very deep reality for us. And I think that one of the reasons that this is so important is because we tend to think that access may be granted or gained some other way.

Is it gained through angels? Well, I'm sure that maybe you don't think that, but maybe you think it's through saints. Or maybe if not, maybe it's just other spirits. Or what about the world in which we live in if they try to access God?

[8 : 35] How do they think that that's done? How do you think that that's done? But it's not that complicated. I think that what Paul's trying to communicate to us here is there's, even though there's a mystery to that, that there is accessibility, there should be some simplicity about it as well.

And this is why it's actually so simple. Because it's just one. It is the one Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit that has achieved that for us.

And apart from him, we don't actually have that access. And it doesn't have to be really complicated. But we seem to complicate it for ourselves. And what is it that complicates the accessibility of the Father to us in our lives?

And sometimes it's things just like crisis and fear or anger or controversy or just busyness, isn't it? And I think that if you read what goes on actually before this single verse, we find out that the Apostle's trying to say to us, look, it really just does come down to this one thing.

The one reason that we don't have this accessibility on our own terms to the Trinity is because of sin. Right? It is sin that actually keeps us from having that accessibility.

[9 : 49] And we can't do for ourselves what only the Son and the Spirit can do. He's the one who achieves that accessibility for us. And we know what that's like, don't we?

We know, actually, and in some sense, above the Father's head, as it were, is this big sign to us as we approach him on our own, which is access denied.

Right? You know, in the world in which we live in, we have our own financial accounts and resources. Right? And there's only one way that you can access them. Right? You either have to have a personal identification number or a password or an access code.

Right? And you put that in and then you can gain access to your, what we might think is our financial security. But really, in reality, so what? There is a security that's much greater than that kind of security.

And it doesn't come by any of our own resources, does it? Paul is saying, look, it comes by the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

[10 : 50] That's how we have access to our Father who is in heaven. It's not impossible, only made possible by God himself. But really, in some sense, it should be that simple.

So that's the first thing that Paul, I think, is saying to us and we need to come to terms with before we then look how our peace with God is then expressed as a nation, as a household, and then as a temple.

But before we get to those positive images, Paul says something that's actually quite negative. Well, something that we're not. Look at me in chapter 2 and verse 19.

So then, he says, You are no longer strangers and aliens. I don't know if you've thought about yourself as strangers and aliens. Thought of yourself in those terms.

I'm a stranger. I'm an alien. I'm glad not to be an alien here in Canada. I'm a permanent resident. If you tried to gain residency in the United States, you would be called a resident alien.

[11 : 52] That's what they have down there. They have aliens. They're all over the place. You want to see an alien? Just go to the United States. Anyway, if you don't want to see an alien, just stay here and be a citizen, which we'll get to in a minute, or a permanent resident.

Right? That's what we are. But you're no longer now strangers or aliens. That's what he wants people to know. And he does this up in chapter 2 again before verse 18.

And he says to them that they are also, look at me with verse 12, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise.

So he's just referring back to that in shorter terms. It's more specific there. And he's talking actually about the Jews and the Gentiles. And they're actually, there's great hostility between them.

Actually between them is this wall called hostility. And they're at actually odds with one another. And yet at the same time supposed to be, well, they were once two humanities, the Gentiles and the Jews, now one humanity, one church, one people of God.

[13 : 01] And he's saying, look, you're now no longer aliens and strangers to one another. And the reason that you're not is because you once actually were aliens and strangers to God. But because of this peace that's been achieved and given you access to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, you are no longer strangers and aliens.

And he falls short of, though, not saying, so stop acting like it. That's not who you are. You are someone else. Now it's one thing to say what you're not. It is another thing to say who you are.

Right? And we can say that about our lives. We're not this, that, or the other. But what are you if you're not one thing or the other? Right? Well, this is what he says then.

The first thing he says is that you are the citizens with the saints. Right? Right? It's pretty incredible. Citizens of the saints. Now, citizenship conveys a whole host of things, doesn't it?

But we'll just kind of boil it down to a few things. And that is that when you're a citizen, you know that you're a member of something that's much larger than you. It's greater than you. And it's great when that's the case, isn't it?

[14:07] Because in the world in which we live in, and especially in the world that we live in now, where there's so much kind of individualism, and there's pressure that can be put on our children and all hosts of people that, with our children.

It's what do you want to be when you grow up? What do you want to do? Trying to decide what exactly that, how that's going to come about. And that's very difficult. Or if you're going through a transition in your life, and maybe it has something to do with your marital status, or maybe it has something to do with your professional status.

You're trying to decide who you are, or what it is that you're going to do. Well, part of the answer to that coming to us from Paul is, look, your identity is greater than that.

You're a part of a larger nation. This is God's nation, God's people. And you have citizenship in that. And not only in that, but it is not just the citizenship that's right here, but it includes the saints, past, present, and future.

You're a part of something that is much, much larger. That's where your identity is derived. And isn't that great? So that identity, that nationality that we have, that again has been achieved through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit who give us peace with the Father and access to Him, is a great benefit that is described in these terms of being citizens of the saints.

[15:26] And that would be really important if you were this small band of Jews, small band of Gentiles, coming together as one humanity under Christ, living in the Roman Empire, this great and powerful empire.

There's this little church. But is it really that small? No, it's something that's much greater. Designed by God, built by God, and has peace with God. Something that we know that the Roman Empire wouldn't enjoy forever, and any other empire for that matter.

You have peace with God and His nation. It's His people. It's your identity. You're a nation of saints. Isn't that great? I'm glad to be a part of that.

Well, he doesn't stop there. The next thing that he moves then to is the household. Well, it's one thing to be a part of this large nation, right? But let's face it. When you have citizenship in a large nation, that's not so great as it might seem at first.

I mean, it's good. I don't want to minimize it. But it isn't before actually long that you realize that it seems like you're just kind of a number, aren't you? And that's all you are.

[16:35] And there's got to be something that's more intimate, more personal than that. And let's face it. Citizens don't always know one another. In fact, there's more people that are citizens with you in Canada that don't know you than who do know you.

Right? And so you want to be... Sorry. Am I supposed to stop now?

Well, we'll see if I come back on. Am I there? I'm here too. Okay. The household of God.

And so members of households are known personally, right? You can actually love one another. I'm not sure citizens really love one another. Maybe they do, but certainly not to the extent that members of a household can love one another.

Your needs are expressed. You can express your needs. You can hear the needs of one another and therefore love one another. That's what is being conveyed here about this image of the household of God and what the Trinity has achieved for us and done for us that we cannot possibly do for ourselves.

[17:47] We're members together in that household. And Paul didn't have a household, a nuclear family like ours. I can't remember what the average is. Maybe in Canada now.

Boy, whatever the demographic looks like with one and a half children. Or is it 2.1? I don't know. I can't remember. But at any rate, this is an extended family with grandparents and parents and children and grandchildren and servants.

It's a slightly larger entity. That's what he's thinking of in terms of a household. But in that household, we can actually love, care for one another.

Where we also, let's be honest, isn't always a peaceful place, is it? And in the country, that when someone offends someone, if it goes as far as it possibly can and sometimes does, that has to be dealt with in a court of law.

But it shouldn't in the family. People should love, care, show kindness, mercy, forgiveness. And that's what he's saying about the church. We should actually know one another by name.
[18 : 52] And I know that I don't know all of you by name. And I want to do that. I know that all of you don't know one another by name. But this is what he's saying about the church. That we can love one another.

We should love one another. That's what the household of God is. And Jesus is the chief cornerstone. He is the key member in this household. And he shows us what it actually means to be a member of this household.

And it's on him who is the chief cornerstone on which this household is built. Paul says actually more about that than the other two. But it's worth looking at, isn't it? Look at me with verse 20. Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure being joined together grows in a whole. Well, let me stop there.

Because I'll come to the next part. But the foundation of this is the apostles and the prophets. Because Jesus is the one who preached peace to those who are far and near.

[19 : 51] And that continues on with the apostles and the prophets. Right? That's the foundation of this household. What's absolutely critical to it is the truth that's reliably transmitted on from one generation to the next.

By the apostles and the prophets. That's the foundation of this household. You want to see a household that stands? That's it. Jesus himself talked about this at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Right? When he talked about the house that was built upon a rock.

Right? The winds blow. The rains beat. The house that's built on a sand washes away. But the one that's built on a rock. Actually, it says the foundation of rock will stand. That's the foundation of the church and the house that stands and loves one another.

That's the second image. The third image is absolutely astonishing. So he goes from something that's grand to something that's small. To something that's utterly holy and beautiful and majestic. Right? It is the temple. Here's what he says. He says, He says, What do you think about being a temple?

[21 : 16] There's an amazing thing. When Jesus first came, Right? John tells us that the word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us.

But something's actually shifted here. Of course, the temple was this great place identified with the presence of God. That's what the first reading was about from Chronicles.

I'm going to try to turn you to another one in 1 Kings chapter 8 in a second. But the temple was the place that was filled with the glory of the Lord. God was identified with the people and his presence in that very place.

That was part of the blessing of God. But something's shifted now. The church, the people are now the dwelling place of God. And Jesus didn't come to dwell among us.

But to actually dwell in us. Like he dwelt in the temple. But now it's not a building. It's a people. He's dwelling in you.

[22 : 21] He's dwelling in me as we're gathered here. And we're growing. Right? Look at me. Look at me. Sorry. Look with me. It's just a simple word. I know you're looking at me.

Thanks for looking at me. Goodness. Turn to page 287. Chapter 8. It's very, it's another account of what we read earlier.

287 chapter 8. Verse 10. And when the priest came out of the holy place. This holy temple.

A cloud filled the house of the Lord. So that the priest, get this. Could not stand to minister. Because of the cloud of the glory of the Lord. Filled the house of the Lord.

Then Solomon said. The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have indeed built you in an exalted house. A place for you to dwell forever.

[23 : 24] Well. God still dwells in his house. He still dwells in his temple forever. And we. Here. Wherever Christians are gathered. By the preaching of God's word.

Are his house. And he dwells in us. It's absolutely astonishing. Now turn with me to. Psalms chapter 27. I'll show you this.

Verse 4. Look what David says. David who longed to build a house. Who longed to build a temple for the Lord. But couldn't because he spilled too much blood. He was too busy fighting wars.

Right? Mind you obviously. He was a man whose heart was after God. God's heart was in him. This is what he says. Right? One thing I have asked the Lord.

That will I seek after. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord. All the days of my life. To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. And to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter.

[24 : 30] In the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent. He will lift me high upon his rock. Just longs. Desires. Wants to be in the house.

In the temple of the Lord. And it's a safe place. Isn't it? In the day of trouble. Where will he find himself? Right? And what does he want to do? He wants to gaze upon the fair beauty of the Lord. And look at this. Inquire in his temple. That's why I say when memorized scripture. It's not just for children. It's for adults. And as we do that. And we inquire of the Lord. We find ourselves in his presence.

Like no other way it seems. Just dwelling on the Lord. Rather than dwelling on some of the other things. That we can dwell on in life. Right? That get us sidetracked. That seems like it kind of undercuts us.

Trips us up. But no. This is what David wants to do. And that's actually who we are. And it's just a beautiful picture. Of what the church is. Right? Here is a church. That is at peace with its Lord.

[25 : 28] Why? Because we have access to the Father through the Son. And in the Spirit. Okay? And there's no place else. That I'd rather be than this. You know that David in Psalm 84 says it's better to dwell in the house of the Lord.

Than in the tents of wickedness. And let me close with this. Time is up. Last night I went to a gala. And it's not one of my favorite things to do. And maybe it is yours. You might like that sort of thing. But I came away from it last night. Just having a great time with my wife.

And partly one of the reasons I had such a great time as well. Was because I met two people there. One of whom was a member here. Not that long ago.

But stopped coming. And I know that you probably don't know what it's like to go to things like that as a pastor. But it's a little bit awkward. Shouldn't be. But after last night.

[26 : 28] I'm looking forward to going to places more like that. And it's for this reason. One person greeted me. And she said hello to my wife. My wife is a colleague of hers.

Or her husband. And then she said to me. And she said. Are you in health care too? And I said. Well no. Well. Yeah. My wife looks after the health of bodies. And I look after the health of souls. So just kind of general. Ambiguous like that. Oh really? Well what. How do you do that? So. I said. Come to church and see. I actually told her that I was a pastor.

She asked where. I said St. John's. And she was so excited. Absolutely. I've never been treated like that before. It was just incredible. You know. Usually it's just silence. Or that's nice. Or short conversation.

Whatever the case may be. Well. It just so happens that later. Then I found out. That she was a member here. And she said. That she had been thinking. A lot recently. About coming back to St. John's. I said. Come on. I don't know.

[27 : 23] Maybe actually. They're here this morning. I don't know. But I'm confident. They will be. And then we sat at a table. With a family. So it wasn't just. Kind of couples. And I sat next to a man.

And he. He was not interested in the gala. It was all less interested than me. And. And. And so. When the. The MC started. Kind of leading. He just kind of started a conversation. So what do you do? And I. Unfortunately. Didn't learn my lesson fast enough. Because I'm from Ohio. And we're really slow there.

And he. He said. What do you do? I said. I look after souls. He said. How do you do that? And I said. Well I'm a pastor. Oh you're a man of the cloth. And then proceeded to tell me. A lot of the things. That were actually wrong.

About the church. And I just listened. And then I proceeded to. Have a conversation with him the whole night. And invite him to church. And.

[28 : 19] I think he was going to be here at the nine o'clock service. Don't know if he ended up coming. But it was actually. You know. Amazing. And. As I. My thoughts about going to events like that.

Completely changed. Because of my experience. As great a time as I had there last night. The place that I'd much rather be. Forever. And always. Is right here. With God's people.

In this temple. Because it's the place where he dwells. And while the meal there last night. Was a really great. And full of calories. And maybe more substance. Physically. Than the meal that we'll have here. As a nation. As a family. As a temple of God. Is much greater. Where we have communion. With Christ.

Where we have union. With the Father. Where we dwell. Actually in the spirit. There's nothing like that. It's. Told to us in.

[29 : 14] First. Kings there. About how the. Glory of the Lord. Filled his temple. And right now. The glory of the Lord. Fills this temple. The people of God.

And that's what he has in mind for us. And the words of my mouth. And the meditation of our hearts. Be acceptable to you. O Lord. Our rock. And our redeemer.
Amen.