

A House for All

Ephesians 2: 17-22

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 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; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Around this time, sixty years ago, a church was built. Businesses like Western Electric migrated to Winston Salem. They brought in jobs and attracted people to the area. Neighborhoods sprouted. Then someone said, "Hey, do you know what this street needs? A Presbyterian Church!" They must have wanted to keep up with the Baptists. So a pod from Highland PC seeded the vision. The Bobcats showed up and materials were dropped off. Foundations were poured, rafters hung. They called the new church Bolton Street Presbyterian Church, until the name eventually became Trinity. Today Trinity, we say, is a place where all are loved, where all belong, where all have gifts God uses. Sixty years ago a church was built, today we are a house for all.

A house is an appropriate metaphor, isn't it? If we look at how the church operates it is similar to how we run a household. We have bills and finances to manage. We have "Honey Do-Lists" for our Building and Grounds Committee. Some of our saints run church errands, others do chores. Like in our families, we are expected to share responsibilities to keep the household running. We even call ourselves a "church family." I used to resist the language, but if you keep track of how long the passing of the peace takes it is as if every Sunday is like a family reunion! A few months ago, at Jack Wooten's funeral, I thanked people for coming to the funeral. Many of you said, "Of course, I wouldn't miss it! He is family." We stay committed like family. We don't get to choose who is in the family, which means sometimes we bicker like a family. Our children leave their shoes in the middle of the floor like we are their family. A house for all. It's a good metaphor. The church runs like a household.

When we turn to the letter written to the Ephesians, building a home is the image the writer uses to describe the new thing God is doing. God is renovating the house, like on one of those HGTV shows. Whatever wall has divided us in the past, God is taking a sledgehammer and busting out the dry wall. No more separation or segregation. We now all belong under the same roof. The writer says to imagine as if the church is split in half, right down the middle. On one side represents those who have traditionally been "insiders" and the other side are those who have been labeled "outsiders." But in the new household of God the apostles and prophets have laid the concrete foundation, the Spirit is fusing two sides into one, and at the peak holding the two sides together is Christ who is the capstone. And if we don't intentionally make space for those

who are “outsiders” we are literally only half a church. God has taking the building and making renovations to add to the family. Now we all belong under the same roof.

Of course, we know it is easier said than done. Adding new members to the house is not always a smooth operation. We all have our preferences when it comes to how to decorate, or what traditions we hold dear, or how to do things, or how we should worship. But when we do come together, with all our diversity, we become more than a house for all. We also become the home for God’s Spirit.

[singing] Let us build a house where love can dwell...

This can probably be best illustrated through a children’s story about a Pelican and a Grasshopper. The Pelican and the Grasshopper were the best of friends, who loved to go to church together. But they were very different. The Pelican was what you might call a contemplative traditionalist. He was quiet and introverted. He was a cradle Presbyterian, so he sat in the back of the room. When the church would pass the peace he stood in the same spot, would shake a few hands and would sit down. The Pelican loved a well-structured predictable service. His most valued part of the service was when the choir sang and he could just sit there and contemplate, allowing the music to wash over him as he recharged his soul for the upcoming week. His favorite scripture verse was, “Be still and know that I am God.” So week after week he loved being still, basking in the love and glory of God.

Then there was the Grasshopper. She wasn’t raised in the church, but had more of a charismatic personality. During the passing of the peace she would hop around the room making sure she greeted all the new guests and people she hadn’t seen in a while. She loved wearing bright colors and preferred a more lively service. Her favorite part was the moment just before the preacher said her first word. She loved the anticipation. She loved the energy. She loved a sermon that named the injustices she encountered in the world on a daily basis. You know, the world wasn’t always kind to grasshoppers like her. She loved to enthusiastically clap after the choir sang, and would shout out “Amen!” frequently throughout the service. Her favorite verse was “Make a joyful noise to the Lord!” So week after week she would come to worship fired up, making joyful noises to the Lord while hopping around the room.

One day, the Pelican grew tired of the Grasshopper’s enthusiasm and so he said, “Must you always be hopping around the room! You know, we had a wonderfully quiet service before your type came around!” And the Grasshopper responded, “Now wait just a minute! Before my “type” came around you were the frozen chosen from the ice age! I like to think my “type” has thawed y’all out a bit! Now at least there is some evidence of the Spirit in the room!” So the Pelican said, “Humph” and huffed over to one side of the room. The Grasshopper said, “Pffft” and puffed onto the other side. And wouldn’t you know that day the choir sang:

[singing] Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live

A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.

The Pelican sat quietly as the music washed over him, and he began to smile to himself. The Grasshopper raised up her hands and shouted a loud, “Amen!” And they realized that what made the church a home wasn’t the building, or the traditions, or even the service style—although they

both had strong opinions about it. What made the church a church is God was there. Affirming that they both were loved, they both belonged, and they both had gifts that God was using to make a difference in the world.

What makes us a church is God's Spirit is here, still making renovations to make room for others. 60 years ago a church was built. Today, we are a house for all. Whether you are a Pelican or a Grasshopper, welcome home.