

March 16th 2014: celebration of 10th anniversary of opening: Eph 2:11-22 'Building Together The Dwelling Place Of God'

I'm sure that all of you here today would agree with me that the focus of this weekend has been on remembering. And consequently it should come as no surprise that the first and only instruction in the passage of Scripture we are looking at this morning also calls us to remember. To remember something that has eternal consequences. To remember as a group the amazing change in our situation before God, and with one another, since Jesus became our Saviour and Lord. Ephesians 2:11-13 says:-

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision". Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Those Gentiles or non Jewish people to whom Paul wrote had firsthand knowledge of the dreadful hostility between the Jews with their one God religion and the rest of the world. The Jews basically said—'we own the right to worship the One true God and we have no intention of sharing that with you. And in even if we wanted to we can't because you are the 'uncircumcised'.

That's the way it is. If you are prepared to go through all the many stipulations we make then we might let you in but don't count on it. You are not part of Israel. You are not children of the promise. You are not connected with the true God and you have no hope of escaping the judgment that is to come. That's the way the cookie crumbles'.

But the point that Paul is making here is that despite the horrible and arrogant way the Jews had of putting it across, a lot of what they said was true. Up to the coming of Jesus all the promises that God had given through His prophets did seem to centre on the Jewish people. If you were not a Jew then you were in a hopeless place. However, writes Paul, with the coming of Jesus God proclaimed that the gift of forgiveness and eternal life was available to all people. And God caused you to receive that message and to believe.

So remember today, writes Paul, what an incredible change in your life your believing in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour has brought about. (v13)

For now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (&v18 CEV)

And because of Christ, all of us can come to the Father by the same Spirit

Now we do not have the Jew/Gentile problem that they struggled with, but we know that before we became a believer we had no certainty about our connection with God as

Father. No reality of our sins being forgiven. No guarantee of our lives and our future being a special part of God's plans. Then God drew us to Himself and changed everything.

So just like Paul's readers we too have this wonderful gift of Grace God gave us the day we first believed and we need to remember that and never take it for granted.

And says Paul, there is the need for us in our remembering, to centre our hearts on what our position in Christ means for us now. (v19)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household

You are no longer on the outside looking in, says Paul. You are fellow citizens with God's people throughout the world and members of God's family together, for that's what household means in this context.

(I was born into a very large family with several brothers and sisters and from my very young years I have always been thankful for that. But even more important to me than that is that I am part of a family that is worldwide. That in Christ I have brothers and sisters whom I will never meet on this earth but with whom I have this connection)

And the fact that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit head up this family and care for us and through us for other family members is absolutely incredible.

It means that we are never alone, even in times of great crisis and despair.

So if the worst happens, and for you that maybe being told that you or someone close to you has this terrible disease and has only a short time to live. And it's News that throws you into the pit of despair, Challenges your faith and may even cause you to doubt your God. Yet even that terrible scenario can never change the fact that you are part of God's family, and that He will never leave you alone or unsupported, and that He has these unchangeable plans for your eternal future.

Or if you are struggling with a sin that has you in its grip even though you are a believer. A dreadful habit that is so hard to break. An addiction that occasionally rears its head and takes over your life. And the devil scorns you, and the guilt begins to destroy you, and you wonder how God can still love you when you find it so hard to love yourself. And God says, remember you are in my family and I will always love you and never leave you. My forgiveness, my strength, and my renewing is fresh every morning.

Or perhaps you are going through a dark place where nothing is going right for you, and you are constantly feeling depressed and alone. You find that you are avoiding other people, even those in the family of God because of it. Yet, even though you may not sense it, the arms of Christ are always around you, and He will keep you for you are family to Him.

Or it may simply be that your Christian walk has become rather insipid lately. You turn up for church on a weekly basis but the passion has gone out of your Christianity and you need to remember again how important you are in God's family, and how much God yearns to use you and walk with you.

It is so important for us to constantly remember how amazing it is that God has called us into His forever family and constantly cares for us as His children.

Then there is one final thing that Paul wants us always to remember and that is what we are becoming in Jesus, and he mentions it in v22:-

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

This weekend we have celebrated the visible church extensions that we have appreciated for the last ten years. But I know that however wonderful a building may be it is only brick and tile. There is another building that is still being constructed and every believer is part of it, and that building is the people of God.

Never forget says Paul that you are continuously being built together to become a building in which God lives by His Spirit.

This beautiful church is known as the Church of the Holy Family and is a massive, privately funded Roman Catholic Church that has been under construction in Barcelona, Spain since 1892 and is not expected to be complete until at least 2026. Just about every day work continues on this church and will continue until it's finally completed.

So with God's church which is His believers in this world. We are God's cathedral which is constantly being built up, refined and renewed by Almighty God.

You may have heard the slogan, "Be patient God has not finished with me yet". That applies most to God's church. God's cathedral. But even as God is working on our construction, adding stones daily and shaping and adjusting the stones already in place, He is still making His presence known through His people. Touching others with the truth that He dwells within the groups of those who love Him wherever they are in the world.

Consequently our passion as believers is not to serve or worship by ourselves but to do so as part of God's church. God's building. Relying on one another for support, encouragement, inspiration, and enabling.

The other day someone told me about a relative of theirs who was a non-Christian and who had become quite sick. And as a Christian they had been encouraged by their involvement in a church group to care for people like this and to show them the love of Christ. So as they prayed about this they recalled a book that another believer in their group had mentioned and they decided to send it to their relative and to get other believers to pray with them concerning it. To their joyful surprise the book was not only received but read and now that relative is regularly attending a church and dragging

their husband along too, which is a real miracle. And what we see is God working through His Body. Showing His presence within His building, and continuing to build as He does so.

So the exciting thing is that if you are a believer this morning than you are an integral part of something that God is using to reveal His presence within this world. And the challenge is that you become more and more involved in the body that God has made you part of. Doing what God wants you as a living stone in His Cathedral, for whatever it is He has for you to do, for if you are not doing it His building in that one area is not complete. But when you play your part, however small that may seem to you, then God's work is happening. And He will have the glory.