

Ephesians 3 January 22nd

AEMMC

This is our fourth week in Ephesians. ****Slide1-Intro****

I think we've been having some fun with it,
as well as doing some learning together.

Last Sunday we were in chapter 2.

The high point of chapter 2 is found in verses 14-18 ****Slide2****

*For he himself is our peace,
who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh
the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments
expressed in ordinances,*

*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two,
so making peace,*

*For through him we both have access
in one Spirit -- to the Father.*

//

There is nothing random about these verses.

And Paul's audience understood very well what the dividing wall really was.

This is not ONLY a metaphor.

Paul is talking about the physical walls of the temple –
Walls that separated holy and unholy, Jew and Gentile,

God and man.

Last Saturday Michael did a great job of explaining the elaborate structure of the Jerusalem temple.

It was physically designed / to create a separation:

Between holy and unholy
Between Jew and Gentile // between men and women.

Even inside the court of Priests there were divisions,

And only once a year / the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place.

Only once a year – and only the High Priest.

And there were elaborate rituals for passing between certain stages.

I wonder if we can really imagine what it would be like
to live into / those rituals and meanings.

Imagine -- not being able to approach God / except through the Priest.

And imagine being that priest, with shaking hands,
preparing to enter the Most Holy Place.

Here is how they did it.

Another priest would tie a rope around your ankle,
so that if you had not prepared properly

And if God killed you as you approached the mercy seat,

They could simply drag your body out of there without having to enter.

Imagine growing up hearing stories like this,

And then as a young man making your own sacrifice every year.

Only a man could do this by the way.

Kill the lamb, watch the blood flow.

This is serious stuff!

Then imagine // that along comes a new teacher.

He has his own radio show.

The other preachers seem to like him.

But he starts to say strange things about himself –

And strange things about your customs and beliefs.

As if there is something MORE than sacrifice –

Something greater than the Law itself –

And it's hard to understand what he is getting at, this good teacher from Nazareth.

//

Cultural barriers are hard to cross.

When the barriers are also religious, they are even tougher to cross.

Some systems resist change – and they also resist human growth.

They seem to run on fear / and distance.

These systems seem to almost have personality –

Paul calls them “stoichea” (also Gal. 4 and Col. 2) **** Slide3****

And in Ephesians 3 Paul tells us that

through the Gospel / the wisdom of God

Is made known / to the rulers and authorities / in the heavenly realms – to the stoichea.

//

Now here we have to pause and step back a bit in the story.

Here in Ephesians 3 we find Paul in prison –

And we know the story – we know how he got there.

And it wasn't simply that he was proclaiming the good news –

It was that he was proclaiming the good news to Gentiles.

And as we talk about this, I want you to keep in mind where we have just been.

Cultural and religious differences run deep.

But in the fullness of time – Christ arrived.

The Cross marks a turning point in human history. More than a point – a radical break.

It marks the end of religion // in the face of revelation.

It marks “the end of the law for all who believe” in the words of Paul.

And in the words of Jeremiah

*This is the covenant I will establish with the house of Israel
after that time, declares the Lord.*

*I will put my laws -- in their minds
and write them -- on their hearts.*

I will be their God,

and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31; Heb. 8:10-11

But not only that –

It marks the end of worship in temples, the end of Holy places.

And it marks the end of human divisions between holy and not-yet-holy,

Between Jew and Greek / male and female / priest and people.

All these divisions have meaning outside Christ,

But in Christ all things are made new. ****Slide4****

Where once sacrifice and priesthood stood between us and God,

That has all changed. Or as the writer of Hebrews put it,

Now there have been many of those priests,
since death prevented them from continuing in office;
but because Jesus lives forever,
he has a permanent priesthood.

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him,
because he always lives to intercede for them. Ch 7

We have a Heavenly Temple and a perfect and eternal priest –

Therefore the dividing wall is gone, and our future is secure.

//

This is all background -- now back to the story.

Remember my “M” words – mystery, memory and mission.

Here in chapter 3 Paul tells us that the **mystery** is revealed –

And remember Paul in Galatians – he tells us that his encounter with Christ was personal.

He literally received the Gospel message by revelation.

This becomes critical because the message of *grace* was *so radical*

That the Jerusalem disciples didn’t fully grasp it.

Paul writes in Galatians 1

“the Gospel that was preached to me is *not according to man*—

For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it –

Gal. 1:11-17

So what is this amazing revelation? Verse 6 ****Slide5****

This mystery is that *through the gospel*
 the Gentiles are heirs -- together with Israel,
 members together of one body,
 and sharers together -- in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ok – big deal Paul?

But it IS a big deal –

Remember that this people Israel is formed – died in the wool – raised with mother’s milk

To think about *separation* – Jew and Gentile, Holy and unholy –

Priests and sacrifice and law.

Maybe a generation ago here, not so different. *English and Mennonite, city and village –*

Some things just don’t mix.

And here is Paul now talking about Gentiles as heirs with Israel—

Gentiles becoming Holy –

Ok, I like Gentiles just fine but do I want my daughter to marry one?

We humans like to make distinctions.

We like to make judgments –

Maybe – if we are honest – we like to point fingers.

Because as long as my finger points at you, I don’t have to look so honestly at myself.

We like to know who is in and who is out..

And to ensure that we are IN.

God isn’t like that.

His entire purpose in salvation goes against that movement in exclusion.

At the Cross // mercy trumps judgment.

God’s purpose, as we saw in Ephesians one and two,

Is to create one new humanity in Christ – without human, petty distinctions.

Paul makes it crystal clear

The Cross is the great leveller.

We all bow at the Cross – equally sinful,

Equally in need of mercy.

These human differences fall away –

In Christ // there is no male or female,

No black or white // Jew or Greek

No rich or poor

No slave or free (3:26-29)

Paul has rejected even his ethnic identity to find himself IN CHRIST ALONE.

How can he do this?

Because he has been grafted into a new spiritual family.

He has been newly created *in Christ*.

In Galatians 3:7 Paul writes,

“Understand, then, that those who have faith / are children of Abraham”

And this stunning statement in Galatians 3:16

The promises were spoken to Abraham -- and to his seed.

Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people,

But, “and to your seed,” meaning one person // who is Christ.

The Promise of salvation is sure / not because it is made / to me and to you,

But because / *it is made to Jesus* –

the son of Adam, son of Abraham, son of David, son of God.

The Promise is sure / *because it is made to Jesus*.

IN Jesus two are united – the perfect Priest and the perfect Sacrifice.

In the world we have determined familial ties by human blood lines,

but now in God’s family / we determine them / by covenant and the blood of Christ.

Therefore,

if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:

The old has gone, the new is here!

///

Back to the story. /

Fifteen years after the resurrection the Jerusalem Christians still return to the temple to worship.

If the Gospel is true –

If Jesus is now the only High Priest –

They face the end of everything they have known...

The law was given by Moses.

David built the Temple.

Sacrifices have been going on since Abraham –

It's all finished? Impossible!

Might as well call black white, and white black.

They know that Jesus changed many things,
but they are still going to the Temple to worship. ****Slide6****

So in Acts 10 and 11 Peter has a vision –

he sees unclean animals on a great sheet, lowered from heaven.

And he hears the voice of the Lord to “kill and eat.”

Of course, he refuses!

These animals are unclean and would make him unclean.

The voice comes a second time,

“What God has cleansed / is no longer unholy.”

The vision is repeated three times, and Peter is confused.

What's going on? He doesn't understand.

While he is still thinking about this, men arrive sent by the centurion Cornelius.

And Peter hears the Spirit telling him to receive them.

They tell Peter that an angel appeared to Cornelius and instructed him to send men to Peter.

Peter returns with them, begins telling the story of Jesus,

And the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all those who are listening.

The Jews who have come with him are stunned!

The old walls have crumbled and fallen down. ****Slide7**** Paul writes,

*For he himself is our peace,
who has made us both one / and has broken down in his flesh
the dividing wall of hostility / by abolishing the law of commandments
expressed in ordinances,*

*that he might create / in himself / one new man in place of the two,
so making peace,*

This new humanity God is creating in Christ does not know human distinctions.

And the great struggle we face in our day is not between Jerusalem and Athens.

Our struggle is not between religion and secularism.

An awful lot of people think that's the great battle.

But the real battle is between Jerusalem and Antioch.

Our struggle is to carry the radical grace of the gospel

Out into the hiways and byways..

To let God's grace seep into the cracks and crevices and broken places of our world.

Or to put it another way,

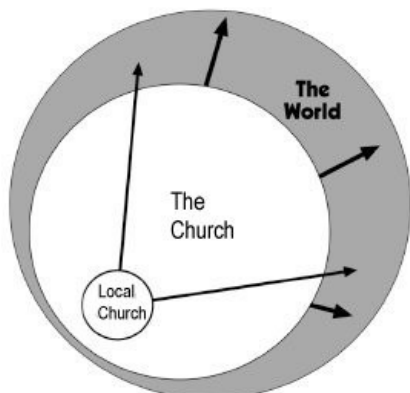
We are the Jews of today / and our churches are Jerusalem.

How will we take the gospel to Antioch?

Or put another way, as we did two weeks ago --

What does it mean to be in the world, but not OF the world? **** Slide8 ****

The "Sent" Church



Remember the two views of the relationship between church and world --

We talked about the GOING church – and the SENT church.

The sent church sees its role as integral in the wider society.

We are “in” the world but not “of” the world.

We exist as salt / and light.

We are a unique, or counter-culture, within
-- the cultures of the world.

The world is a dangerous place / but Christ goes before us.

We are called to live within the world to influence
and to communicate our message by word / and by deed.

Together we are a living Temple –
we take God with us wherever we go in the world and make his goodness known.

IN the first view, the “Going” church,

Our fear is the same as Peter’s fear.

“If I touch someone unclean / then I become unclean.”

IN the second view, the “Sent” church / we have a completely different view.

This is radically different.
It is rooted in a *different view* / of God and the world.

In the second view / if I touch someone "unclean" / *they become clean*.

The first view results in a protected way of living,
It creates Christian silos that have *no contact* / with the corrupt world.

Inwardly, in our churches / it creates Christian cops,

Thought police,

Who are always on the lookout / for signs of worldliness in Christian circles.

The result of the first view is that we focus on sin rather than grace.

We worry about all the wrong things!

And this power / of fear and control,

Comes from what Paul calls the *stoichea* – the fallen powers –

The fallen powers want us to live in fear!

Because those who live in fear will live by the law.

And those who live by the law will consider *themselves* holy

While everyone else is outside the camp.

So here we are two thousand years later.

And here are my questions:

IF temples are irrelevant – because WE are the temple.

IF there are no professional priests, only the body of Christ filled with the Spirit.

IF there are no holy places – only holy PEOPLE..

What does that mean for ministry and for mission in our time?

We need to revalue service / priesthood / in the world.

Heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool.

If all the world belongs to God, we want to serve wherever God places us.

We want to carry the presence of God, light into dark places.

Sunday occupies a few hours a week.

What is God up to for the rest of the time?

A living priesthood is active wherever God is at work. ****Slide9****

At the CPC Mike Frost told the story of the growing street life in his Sydney neighbourhood. The mayor called him up.

They were spending 1.4 million dollars a year trying to deal with the impact of alcohol and drug abuse and violence in this one neighbourhood.

It was making no difference. Maybe the churches could help?

Mike organized a meeting with a group of local churches. 500 people showed up.

They asked that anyone who would be interested in volunteering as a street pastor sign up. He explained the situation.

It would mean going out from 10 PM to 4 AM on Friday and Saturday night,
once a month rotation,

going out in pairs to talk to people who are wandering around, coming out of bars etc.

And they have a T-shirt (and also a UK website) that says “street pastor.”

Mike told them – it will be messy, sometimes maybe dangerous.
You will be broken, lonely, smelly, mixed up people.

200 people signed up. The oldest was a 75 year old woman.

God reigns!

God is active where we are, wherever we name him Lord.

WE are sent, as Jesus was sent, into the world. ****Slide10****

Bonhoeffer writes,

God is beyond in the midst of our life.
The church stands,
not at the boundaries where human powers give out,
but in the middle of the city.

**The church stands
In the power of God**

In the middle of the city.

Let me close with Heb 10

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence
to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,

by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain,
that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith,
having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience
and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward
love and good deeds --