

Ephesians 2:12-22 – “One in Christ”

...remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 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.

When I became the Lay Minister of Farmington UMC a few years back I was sent to the Conference training for New Pastor's. At the training, our closing communion was conducted by Brenda Walker, a new pastor to our conference. Brenda had recently moved to the Bay Area from Pennsylvania. She's about 5-feet tall, Caucasian and had been assigned to the Oakland Chinese Community UMC. As she came up to the bread and wine, she posed this question to the rest of us new pastors, “Have you ever wondered how you got here?” I thought it was a good question – especially for new pastors. But it's also a good question for you. Have **you** ever wondered how you got **here**? What brought you to this place, at this time? Our faith journeys may be a day, week, months, years or decades long. What brought us here? Look around. Other than **here**, we may not regularly hang out with each other. It may be politics, or socio-economic, or cultural reasons that would normally separate us, but here we are – together.

As Christians our journey began 2,000 years ago. As our reading today said, “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.”

A few years ago, Nancy and I took a vacation to Ireland with my younger brother and his wife and my Older brother's son and his wife. While we were in Dublin, we visited Christ Church Cathedral where Sitriuc, Norse king of Dublin, founded the original Viking church around the year 1030. That church eventually burned down and was replaced with the present building in the 1500s, though it too has had some remodeling. I'm telling you this because while we were there, it occurred to me just how far back our church family goes.

It began with Christ and his founding members which led a thousand years into the future to the establishment of a church of the faithful in a small village of Ireland, named Dublin.

From there, we jump ahead 900 years to a small coastal village in California, where in 1928 another church of the faithful was established on this location. Have you ever wondered how you got here?

At our New Pastors training, Rev. Schuyler Rhodes, currently the Los Rios District Superintendent, led us in a segment on dreaming about how we would like the church to be. Now, we're not talking about the physical building here, we're talking about the building of relationships. We're talking about actually being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in our communities. What would that look like?

Rev. Greg Bergquist, who now serves as General Secretary for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, wondered what would happen if we just sold everything and used the money to do God's work as it was done in the beginning of the early church. Think about that? No overhead. No need to spend money maintaining large buildings like the one in Dublin, or here in Fort Bragg, but instead using it for ministry to feed the hungry; provide medical treatments for the poor or house the homeless. Don't worry, I'm not asking us to do that. Not yet anyway.

I'm going to show you a short video about a Methodist church similar to ours in Little Rock, AR.

[VIDEO]

Friends, God *can* do some marvelous things when we begin to dream and trust in his power.

When the disciples tried to get Jesus to send the crowds of 5,000 and 4,000 away so that they could get food, Jesus said, “You feed them.” They were hesitant because they didn't believe they had the resources to do it, but Jesus showed them that with God's blessing they could do wonderful, miraculous things.

Do we believe that? Do we believe that God still does wonderful, miraculous things? I say let's find out. Let's see what he has in store for us here - in Fort Bragg - if we start dreaming again. Let us begin building the foundation of the kingdom of heaven on earth here in Fort Bragg by working with other faith communities along the coast.

Pastor Diana and I are planning to start what we're tentatively calling the Interfaith Association of Mendocino Coast. It will include people of all established faith communities and anyone else willing to work together in ministry to those in need. We will begin in November with a luncheon, inviting people of faith to our church to see if they will join us in this venture.

Additionally, we are beginning UMC 2nd *Saturday Lay Servant classes* with churches within our Circuit. This is new to our area. Prior to this one had to travel to Santa Rosa, Sacramento or Redding to take these classes. Our first *Basic Lay Servant Class* will be taught by Pastor Diana and I on November 9th from 9:00 am to 5 pm at the Willits United Methodist Church. Flyers are available in the Fellowship Hall. These classes will be ongoing and are being offered through the Great Northern District School for Lay Servant Ministries.

So often when I think I'm finished with my sermon, God taps me and says, “One more thing!” As I was finalizing the preparations for today's message yesterday, I received a ***See All The People*** newsletter from Rev. Junius Dotson, the UMC General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries. The title was, *What If I Say “No”?*

Rev. Dotson reminds us that...

God has given us free will. He doesn't force himself on us. He will speak to our hearts – sometimes in that still, small voice and at other times in a roar like thunder. But, he lets us choose our path.

He goes on, saying that as disciples...

Our motivation must remain pure – minister to people the way Jesus did.... When we see all the people, we will see a world needing compassion and hope. We will realize that with Christ we are powerful enough to change everything! We will do it one person at a time. Each one reach one. We are strong because he is strong. We are determined because he is determined. We show love because he is love.

Let me challenge you to see all the people outside your walls. Then, once you see them, go outside and get in the middle of them, get messy, and get them to understand just how special they are!...

So now, please, join me in prayer for these new ministries Evergreen United Methodist Church....

Lord, when was the last time we stood up, stretching to see over the horizon, stretching to see tomorrow, stretching to see the cutting edge of life? Many times we are complacent and view life from the easy chair. We are sometimes content to let life come to us, taking whatever comes. But no more, Lord.

Lord, shock us out of the easy chair. Holy Spirit, get us up on our feet again; put us on frontiers of your revelation. As seekers, help us affirm our faith. As witnesses, help us speak to others about Jesus Christ. As disciples, help us to follow faithfully. As servants, help us to serve. As your children, let us share eternity. God, we thank you for our dreams and visions. Guide us now as we seek to build your kingdom in the Way of Jesus and let your will be done. Amen.

Benediction

Now that we have worshiped you and heard your Word, inspire us, O Lord, to act upon what we have heard. Enable us to give evidence that we not only pray for your kingdom to come on earth but labor for it as well. In the name and the way of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.