

## **Building a Household of Faith**

*“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone.” Eph. 2: 19-20*

Today Webster Memorial celebrates 62 years of life as a congregation under God’s grace. This is not an insignificant celebration. 62 years of babies being baptized, children and adults being instructed in the Xian faith; 62 years of hundreds of people receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the forgiveness of their sins. 62 years during which the marriage unions of men and women were given God’s blessing before this altar. 62 years of sorrowing people sitting through funeral services, people with tears in their eyes over the death of a loved one. 62 years of God’s word preached in the pulpit of this congregation and then, through mission work which you have done in this city. 62 years of saddened people comforted, frightened people encouraged, weak people strengthened, broken people restored, sinful people absolved, Christian people fed and nourished.

As we reflect this morning on those 62 years we cannot help but thank God for those who have built this household of faith that we now have. The challenge is therefore for those of us who are in the here and now to continue to build the household of faith.

If at all we are going to be a part of the household of faith there must be first an foremost a longing, a yearning of the soul to follow Jesus and belong to the Body of Christ. This must not be confused with a wishful longing to be “one big happy family,” but is a profound conviction that God makes his presence felt in and through the church. The church is neither an attraction nor an event; it is a house and a place of worship.

The NT never draws attention to church buildings. You will never find a word about facilities, but the apostles enjoyed elaborating on the images and metaphors that describe the community of God’s people. Their solidarity was not reflected in structures but in their union with Christ Jesus, their chief cornerstone, and in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Early Xians had a sense of place, a feeling of being at home, not in their facility but together in their shared faithfulness to the Word of God. There was no outward temple or beautiful church sign. to symbolize their place, but as they met together there was a powerful

presence of the risen Lord. The early Christians knew that “the Most High does not live in houses made by men” (Acts 7:48).

Ps. 27 says it well: “The Lord is the stronghold of my life... one thing I ask of the Lord and this will I seek after that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon his beauty and to seek him in his temple,”

And one of my favorite descriptions of dwelling in the presence of God is in Ps. 84:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord  
Almighty!

My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the  
Lord;

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living  
God.

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the  
swallow a nest for herself,

Where she may have her young – a place near  
your altar,

Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
They are ever praising you. [84:1-4]

It speaks of the longing of our hearts to dwell with God.

In the Household of Faith it is important for the people of God to feel at home together. No one

should feel like a stranger in his or her own home.

Jesus calls us into fellowship with God and with one another. God’s presence is made real in community, through the proclamation of the Word of God, in worshiping the Lord together, by caring for one another, and through serving others in the name of Christ.

The apostle Paul was convinced that there was real work to be done in the “Household of faith”. He highlighted two concerns in this context. **First, remember where you were in order to be happy and productive where you are now.** In other words remember the old address so that you may appreciate the new address. In the past you were separated from Christ, excluded from belonging to God’s people, “without hope and without God in the world.” When we first came to Christ, the Body of Christ meant a great deal to us. We sense our need for support and fellowship, accountability and growth. But over time and because of pressures we begin to live relatively reclusive lives. We no longer sense the need for one another in Christ and we do not go out of our way to relate to others. One of the reasons we sometimes fail to find a place in the Household of Faith is because spiritual inertia sets in and we find it difficult to change ingrained patterns of isolation and indifference. However, we need to keep

reminding ourselves that *“if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!” [2Cor.5:17]*

Paul's second concern has to do with the hard work of breaking down the old habits that came with the old life. Because of Christ's righteousness we are free from the penalty and the bondage of sin, but the old habits of sin die hard. We have been reconciled to God, through Christ we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Sometimes we forget the importance of this ongoing ministry and are far to accepting of the “dividing walls of hostility.” In Paul's specific context he spoke of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. He was understandably sensitive to this particular tension among the believers. Humanly speaking the most natural development would have been to divide the churches along ethnic lines. But Paul insisted that God purpose for the body of Christ was radically different. By destroying the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, God intended to unite both in Christ, not in theory, but in actual practice. *‘ his purpose was to create in himself one new person out of two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.’* God's purpose is that we do not divide along cultural, racial, social, gender,

and generational lines. We were meant to be fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the one foundation provided by the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.