

**The Implications of the Easter Season**  
**Sermon on Ephesians 2:19-22**  
**Saint Mark's Watertown**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**  
**April 25, 2004**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Amen.*

God's Word for our special consideration on this third Sunday of the Easter Season is Ephesians chapter two, verses nineteen through twenty-two:

**Consequently, 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 himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

**Introduction: Welcome Back to God's House!**

Dear fellow Christians—through Christ, the house and household of God himself: Welcome back to God's house! The last we worshipped here was Easter Sunday itself—two whole weeks ago. This place hasn't had that long a vacancy since we started restoring it, exactly seven years ago. Last Sunday's worship service up at the Luther Prep Gymnasium was something special, wasn't it? But it's also good to be home!

**Theme: The Implications of the Easter Season**

God's Word to us today also indicates how good it is to be "home", at "home" with God, "home" because of what happened on Easter. On the basis of this section of Scripture, let's consider today: \* THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EASTER SEASON. Because of Easter: (1) WE ARE MEMBERS OF GOD'S HOUSEHOLD. And because of Easter (2) WE OURSELVES ARE GOD'S HOUSE. Isn't that amazing?!

**Part One: We Are Members of God's Household**

Well, it was the Apostle Paul through whom the Holy Spirit inspired God's Word to us today in his inerrant way. Paul was writing from Rome, where he was imprisoned. And he was writing back to the Christians at Ephesus, on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Paul's letter was making about an eight hundred mile trip. And he was writing some three decades after Jesus' death and resurrection.

To his Christian friends in Ephesus, Paul wrote the following. *You were foreigners and aliens.* Probably a little better: "You were foreigners and strangers." Paul was saying, "You Ephesians were not citizens of God's country, and you were not members of God's household." What a sobering message! And it was very true. The Ephesians were Gentiles, not Israelites. The Ephesians had lived a long time without a relationship to the true Lord; they were not circumcised into God's family already as infants. And so, originally: they completely lacked all the privileges of the citizenship of God and all the status of family members of God.

All of that also applies entirely to us, doesn't it? And it doesn't feel any good at all! ...I mean: Have you ever been on the outside, looking in—like this? For example: have you ever been to a foreign country, where everyone was speaking a language you didn't know, and you didn't recognize anyone or anything? Or even, have you ever been to a city that wasn't your own, and you felt lost? Or let me ask you this: Have you ever been to a family gathering of somebody else's family, and you hardly knew a soul, and you were trapped there for most of a day? And then, of course, at the end of the day, you knew you'd never really see many of those people again.

See, that's the way it used to be for us, for our souls! We didn't belong to God's country. No joys of citizenship were ours. We didn't belong to God's family. None of the status his family members enjoyed was ours to have. We were outsiders, looking in. And at the end of the day we knew we'd see neither God nor many other people again.

But see what Paul says? *You are no longer foreigners and aliens* (“strangers”) like that, *but* now you are *fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household*. What a change! And that's the change the Ephesian Christians had undergone. God had now expanded his nation. The Gospel army had marched beyond Israel, into other countries: vanquishing the evil foe, and claiming their people for Christ—not with the sword, of course, but with the Word. And God had now expanded his family. God's Gospel agents had prepared the adoption papers of others into the household of God—not with circumcision, of course, but with Baptism.

And all of that applies entirely to us, doesn't it? And it feels great! ...I mean: have you ever spent some time abroad (where everyone spoke a foreign language and everything was different) and then you got to return home? Have you ever had to visit a different city and spend some time there (in a room not your own, in a bed not your own) but then returned home? Or after that family gathering (of a family not your own), have you ever had the joy of returning to your own family?

See, that's the joy there is for us, for our souls! God has returned us to himself! He's made us natives. We now speak his language. He's given us the rights and privileges of citizenship. He's made us his kids. Now he provides for us daily and protects us daily. Now he's promised us an inheritance, which is paradise. Now we fit! Now we belong to him!

And it's all because of Jesus! Jesus traveled to a foreign country – this earth – to get us adopted. Jesus paid the purchase price – his divine blood – to get us adopted. Jesus signed the papers – isn't that what his resurrection means? – to get us adopted. And now we're children of God. Forever! And as children of God, we are citizens of paradise. Forever! Jesus is the reason, especially during the Easter Season, for all of this.

## **Part Two: We Ourselves Are God's House**

That's the implication of the Easter Season. We are members of God's household, like the Ephesian Christians were. And now, the Apostle Paul tweaks the picture a bit and assures the Ephesian Christians: not only are they members of God's household, they themselves are also God's own house.

Paul writes: You have been *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*. The *apostles*, and those directly associated with them, wrote the New Testament. The *prophets* wrote the Old Testament. And so, what Paul is saying is that the eternal welfare of every Ephesian Christian rested on the Old-and-New-Testament Word of God. *They are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*.

And *Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone*. The important stone in the corner with perfect measurements, from which each wall takes its angle and ultimately the whole building takes its form—that's Jesus! The Bible is all about him. God's Word is no rule book for life, but rather a love letter from the Lord. The Scriptures are his story. Of this building: *Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone*.

So, do you know what it is that makes me happiest, as a pastor? It's seeing you here, in God's house, in fulfillment of these words. It's seeing you dear older saints here, week after week without fail, often in the same seats. It's seeing you dear middle-aged people (like myself) here, week after week, often with all of your family. It's seeing you dear younger saints here week after week: when you could be, say, sinfully partying or lazily sleeping in or greedily making money. But you want to be here at home: listening to your Savior, and thanking him for his goodness.

Do you want to know what else makes me happiest as a pastor? It's getting a phone call or bumping into a person and getting the question, "Say, Pastor, I was reading my Bible, and I was wondering what it meant when God said such-and-so...." What makes me happiest is visiting with a catechism class or a Bible class – full of people! the more the merrier! – and hearing one of you say, "This is what Jesus means to me...."

All of that puts a real smile on my face, but much more importantly: it puts a smile on the face of your Savior. He's rejoicing that: you are *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*.

After all, God's Word to us today concludes: ***In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*** Think of it! All of us Christians together are God's *holy temple*. God dwells among us in his Church. And each of us is *God's dwelling*. God lives inside of you.

Isn't it just amazing to consider just how fully Jesus has caused God to accept us? I really think that we often forget that! I mean: we tend to imagine God saying, "Fine: Christ died for you. Fine: I forgive you. Now, just get away from me. I really don't want to have much to do with you anymore." But that's wrong! God doesn't say that! We are his *holy temple*; we just read that. We are *God's dwelling*; we just read that. God so fully accepts us that he says to us, "Not only do I forgive you, I consider you fully rehabilitated and useful to me—I'm putting you to work."

And my dear friends: God is living in you, and he does put you to work. Two examples.... I'm an avid reader of the local paper. And I've gotten to know the names of most everybody here at Saint Mark's. Well, you know how the Daily Times lists crimes. I'm stunned how few of your names I've ever found there. You don't even commit all that many traffic violations! And you know how the Daily Times lists divorces. How many multiple hundreds of marriages are there among us? Honestly, only really rarely do I see names from here down there. In contrast, pretty regularly there are pictures of people who have faithfully worked for some local company or have volunteered long and hard for some local organization. And there you are. There's where I see your names and faces. You are God's *holy temple*, *God's dwelling*. And it does show!

The other example? Wow, you all do a lot of work here at church! Think of all our fine musicians. Think of all our ushers and greeters. Think of all the people who help keep this church looking as beautiful as it does. Think of all the people involved with Sunday School, or Pioneers, or Youth Groups, or volunteers at our excellent school across the street. Think of all the people – and these aren't nearly so visible – who visit sick and straying, the lonely and lost, who quietly counsel the hurting and grieving.

Folks, we couldn't even keep an accurate count of those numbers! See: You are God's *holy temple, God's dwelling*. And it does show!

**Conclusion: Let's Live as Members of God's Household!**

So, welcome back to God's house today! And now: no, I don't mean this building. This house of God – as much as we treasure it – is only a meeting place of the household of God: you, dear sister in Christ; you, dear brother in Christ. And even then, this house is only temporary. Our Heavenly Father has in mind – someday soon, through Jesus Christ – to upgrade us to a much more glorious house in the heavens. Amen.

*Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.* That's what we celebrate—this Easter Season and always! Amen.