

I came across a story a while back about a cowboy named Joe who took his first trip to the big city to visit his friend, and since he was there on the weekend and since his good friend was going to church, it was only proper for him to attend church services at the local big city church even though he had never been to a church service before.

Cowboy Joe was had just come back from going to church for the first time, and was in the bunkhouse telling the other cowhands about his experience. He said, "When I got there, I parked my pick-up in the corral. Charlie, a worldly cowboy said, "That would be the parking lot, Joe." Joe continued, "I walked up the trail to the door." Charlie said, "That would be the sidewalk." Joe said, "Inside the door was this dude in a fancy suit." Charlie explained to the other cowpokes, "That would be the usher." Joe said, "This dude led me to the chute." Charlie said, "That would be the pew." Joe said, "Yeah, that's exactly what that pretty young lady said when I sat down next to her. She said pew!"

I like that story because it causes me to think what if someone who had no idea of what the church was and what kind of place the church is, what if that person asked me to describe what kind of place the church is, how would I describe? How would you describe it? What kind of place is the church, particularly our church?

Over the past few weeks we have been going through a sermon series debunking the Da Vinci Code and if you were to look at that understanding, the Da Vinci Code's understanding of the church is that the church is a place that suppresses certain groups of people, a place that is built on lies and deceit, a place where the truth is suppressed for the benefit of others. A place built by human hands that divides and that cannot be trusted. Is that the church? I think not.

This morning I want us to look at what kind of place the church is by looking at Paul's account in Ephesians 2 and there is so much we can say about the church but by looking particularly at this passage I want us to see three things that help us to see what kind of place the church is, and my prayer is that you will see that it is a place where you belong.

Now the first thing I want you to see here is that the church is a place that brings people together. Now in the first part of this passage Paul reminds the readers that those who were gentiles were excluded from all the promises and blessings that came from being part of God's chosen people. All the blessings of the promises, the hope, the citizenship and of the Messiah were thought to be ought of their reach and the chosen people of God, the Jews would constantly remind them of that.

You can see the hostility in Vs 11 where Paul says that they were called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves the “Circumcision”. It was kind of a way of saying we’re in and your out. We’ve got it and you don’t. As many of you know, I live in a house of all girls. This past week we reworked the rooms and turned one of our living rooms into a television room for the girls, and they automatically called it the girls room and no boys were aloud. That left me out, so I made my own boys club and went outside with the dog. But you kind of see that idea with the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were supposed to bring the good news of God to all people, but instead they grouped together and said, “We’re in the club and you’re not!”

Now as you can imagine, the hatred was deep on both sides. William Barclay quotes a Jewish teaching from that era that forbade any Jew to help in the birth of a gentile because it would only result in bringing another heathen into the world. Of course the gentiles returned the hatred. If there was ever two groups that despised each other, it would be the Jew and the Gentile.

But in Christ, the walls that separate are broken down and those who were far off can come near. Look at **Eph 2:13**, it says, “**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.**”

Christ broke down the barriers and was able to do what no one else could do. He is able to bring reconciliation, to bring together those who once despised each other and not only make them stop hating, but He is able to make them as one family. Look at **vs. 19**, “**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.**” I like how the Living Bible puts that verse, it reads, “Now you are no longer strangers to God and foreigners to heaven, but you are members of God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.”

We are part of God's family. God made us into a new family. Kind of like a Divine Brady Bunch. God brought together us under one Family, and that is what we are, we are a family. That’s one of the best descriptions I have heard about our church here is that when people come in here they feel like they are family. They feel like they are wanted and welcomed.

(When Gena Yeager left the church when she married and the man stole her away, she said that this place made her feel like this was her home, and she felt that way from day one.) I love it that we have a man like Bubba Turner who loves to go around hugging on people's necks because I've heard many a person say that they automatically felt like they had attended here their entire life, just by walking through the door. We are a family.

I think that is one of my favorite descriptions of the church. The church is a family. As a family you can be just who you are and loved anyway. When I go home to see my mom, I don't have to get dressed up to eat breakfast, I can come downstairs in an old pair of shorts and sleeveless Tee shirt with a giant bowl of cheerios spilling over the sides and feel comfortable doing so. You don't have to pretend to be somebody you're not and you love each other because you are family. You might not have everything in common but you're family. And you have disputes, but you forgive. And the idea family, like we want to be, is one that is a close family.

And as a church family, it's important that we move in our relationships from casual to intimate fellowship. As a family we need to be close. You can have a lot of casual relationships—people you see on occasion and whose company you enjoy. You can even have a handful of close relationships—people with whom you go out to eat with or visit in your home occasionally. But you can have just a few intimate friends.

Those are people who know just about everything about you and love you anyway. These are the people who are there with you when you are down and out and who hold you accountable because they love you. My goal is that in this church you will form those kind of intimate bonds with a few of the other church members. Therapist Will Miller asks, "Who in your life has refrigerator rights?" By that he means who can come into your home and feel comfortable opening the refrigerator and making a sandwich without asking for permission? Those are intimate friends...(or people with a lot of nerve!).

I'm not suggesting you develop scores of intimate friends. Jesus only had three disciples whom He took into His inner circle. There were twelve who were very close and one hundred and twenty who were loyal to Him to the end. Not everyone is intended to be an intimate friend. What I am encouraging is that, as a member of this church, you make an effort to develop some close Christian friends and allow the process to take its natural course. Far too many people in our churches have no meaningful relationships at all. So make it a point to get to know people. Learn their

names, learn their likes/dislikes. Take advantage of chances to get involved in smaller groups and get to know each other.

Now the next thing about the church that I want you to see here is that the church is a place that is built on a rich heritage. Look again at Vs. 19-20, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*” You know I love going into older houses and hearing people talk about how their Great-granddad built the house, and then how this addition was built by granddad, and this part by Dad, and we added this part. I love to hear people talk about the heritage and the contributions of those who came before.

I especially love to hear it when people talk about the rich heritage of our churches. The church has such a long and rich history, and what we are doing today is simply building on what was already laid by those who came before us. Billy Joel had a song a while back that went, “We didn’t start the fire.” Well, we here didn’t start the fire, we are just keeping it going. And one of the greatest things about the church is that the church today is linked to the church at the very beginning. We are all part of the same family. And I’m proud of that heritage. I’m proud that when I stand up here to preach that I stand in a long line of great preachers who have come before me. I’m not the first nor will I be the last.

And this church has a great history and heritage. And it’s importantly that we pass that on to others. I once had a chance to speak at a friends church and while I was there he took me up to the youth room, and this was an older church that still had the old concrete walls, you know the kind with the concrete blocks. Well, in the youth room each youth got a block where they were allowed to write their name, the date, and a scripture verse. And what was really neat was that this man showed me where his dad had wrote on a block, then he showed me where his block was, and then he showed me where his son’s block was. There was three generations there on that wall. And they could share those stories with each other about their church.

And we have a lot of great stories in our church. One of my favorites that I have heard a few times since I have been here, is that during a revival service, a real revival service where Jimmy Lentz was the preacher and he preached about not harming your body and on that day, all the men of the church, men like David Reynolds, Lee Petty, and James Kellum all gave up smoking on that same day. We might start calling it the Great Adaton Smoke-out.

We have some other stories that we can pass on. We have the stories of the miracles that have happened here. Some of you can remember the baptisms, the weddings, that took place here. We have the stories of the lives that have been changed here. Some of you decided to give your lives to Christ in this church. And we have so many people to be thankful for. For the Sunday school teachers who took the time to teach you the stories of the bible, the men and women who shared with you their wisdom, the times you laughed here, the times you cried here.

I love the time when Vivian Whitfield got up here to sing a special and when she did the wrong tape got put in and instead of a quiet worshipful song coming across the speaker, Elvis started to sing.

(Longview: Tell story of so many PK kids in this church and how my kids may one day be back here) There are so many memories here, such a rich heritage.

We have such a rich heritage, and the best thing is that the cornerstone of this church is Jesus Christ. It is His church. He is the head, we are the body. We are a church with a rich heritage.

Now we are called to continue that heritage. Look at vs. 22, “**And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**” You too are being built. We too are building on to that foundation. You know, I’m proud of where we have been as a church, and I am just as excited about where we are going as a church in the future.

As many of you know we are making a new church pictorial and I thank all of you for participating. Now what I have here is two older pictorials, and its fun to look at them. We get to see how people have changed, the memories, and such. 20 years from now, when some new pastor is up here and holds up the new pictorial, what memories will they remember about us today. What memories are we creating. What are we doing to add to the legacy of this church? I want all of us to do our part, and with your help, together we are going to make this church even greater then it is, built on the foundation of those before us, with Christ as the cornerstone of all that we do...For His glory and honor...Amen.

