

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Sunday, May 2, 2021

“Ephesians, Chapter 3”

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell, Senior Pastor

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements

Friends, welcome to worship here at First Presbyterian Church Plymouth. Today is the first Sunday in May and we are so glad that you have joined us for worship today.

It is a blessing here in our church to be celebrating today, not one, but two sacraments. As a church we are blessed today to be baptizing Crosby Frederick Kamer, who's about 10 months old. Crosby and his parents are here and it is a joy, especially after being apart as a congregation for so long, to celebrate the special events in the lives of our church families and in the life of our church as a whole.

Today, as a church family we will also celebrate the sacrament of communion. Now would be a really great time for you to pause this video and go gather within your own homes whatever you have available to use for our communion bread today, whatever provision you have to fill that communion cup, so later in our service, as one family of faith, we can share the signs and seals of God's presence with us through that communion service.

Now while we share that sacred meal together I am also reminded today that there's a team of about 20 volunteers from our church who, on this Sunday morning, May 2nd, are in downtown Detroit on West Grand Boulevard, preparing about 400 to-go lunches for Crossroads Soup Kitchen Ministry. Many thanks to all of our church volunteers, but especially to Chuck Hodge and our local mission committee for organizing this event.

Today in this worship service we will be carrying on in our sermon series on Ephesians and I'm very grateful to be leading this service along with Mark Hovermale and Ashley Ashley. Our music today is provided by our talented Joyful Ringers, our bell choir, and by the vocal support of Carole Moon. I'm grateful to all of them, as well as to Susan Underhill for blending all the aspects of our video service together.

Let us now begin this time of worship by turning to God in prayer.

Rev. Mark Hovermale – Opening Prayer

Let us pray. Lord, we come now at this time to worship you with all our hearts. Help us to give our heart and song and study in overall worship to you and your Son Jesus Christ. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit let this service, wherever and whenever we are participating in it, be a sweet sound in your ear. Amen.

Joyful Ringers Bell Choir plays & Carole Moon sings “Christ For the World! We Sing”

Rev. Mark Hovermale — Scripture Reading

Ephesians, Chapter 3, selected verses (NIV)

Verses 2-3

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

Verse 6

⁶ 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.

Verses 8-11

⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verses 17b-21

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Emily Campbell — Sacrament of Baptism

It is with joy today that we welcome a child into our church family through baptism. We practice the sacrament of baptism, remembering the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Obedying the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and confident of his promises to us we baptize those God has called in baptism. God claims us and seals us to show that we belong to God. God frees us from sin and death, uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and

resurrection. By water and the Holy Spirit we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and called to share in Christ's ministry in the world.

Now of course we recognize that very young children cannot understand these truths but we baptize children today following the promises of God. God has said that these promises are given not only to our children but to our children's children.

Friends, Sandy Dodge is our clerk of session. She is here today to introduce our baptism family.

Sandy Dodge, Clerk of Session

On behalf of the session, it is my pleasure to present Alexandria and Alan Kamer who have come seeking to have their son Crosby be baptized.

Rev. Emily Campbell

Before we move forward, I have some questions for Crosby's parents. What I can tell you is that this service has vows that Crosby's parents will make on Crosby's behalf. There are also vows that the congregation will take. Today I'm pleased to say that Crosby's maternal grandparents are here, as well as family friends and church friends. Together they will serve as our congregation, but we also invite those of you who are at home watching worship today to join in the congregational responses as we move forward in this baptism ceremony.

All right, I have some questions for you before we baptize this happy little guy.

Alan and Alex,

Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Do you? (Parents responded: We do)

Relying on God's grace do you promise to live out your Christian faith and to teach that faith to Crosby? Do you? (Parents responded: We do)

And to you, the congregation, as members of the Church of Jesus Christ, do you promise to guide and nurture Crosby and by word and deed, with love and prayer, encourage him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of Christ's Church? If so please say, "We do." (Congregation responded: We do)

The water we are baptizing Crosby with today was provided by his uncle and this water is from the Holy Land. It's from the Jordan River, so it's very special.

Crosby Frederick, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon you and dwell in your heart forever. Amen.

Friends, look what God has done. The church has gained yet another family member today and we rejoice in Crosby's entrance into God's covenant. It is a delight and together we will welcome him into the church.

Friends, would you all please pray with me. Ever loving God, in your mercy you promised not only to be our God but also the God of our children. We thank you for receiving Crosby today through baptism. Keep him forever in your love. Guide him as he grows. Protect him

from all the dangers and temptations of life. Bring him to confess Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, so he may be his faithful disciple to his life's end. We pray today for Crosby's parents, for Alex and Alan, and ask that you would give them all the resources of love and patience and wisdom that they will need to raise Crosby in faith. Keep this family forever in your loving care. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, as an additional sign of the love and care we have for Crosby, we've gifted him this morning with gifts from the church, a quilt made by Willing Hands Circle, a wooden cross, a baptismal certificate and a letter for him when he gets older to remember what has happened here this day. Let us together thank God for this gift.

Rev. Emily Campbell – Sermon: Ephesians, Chapter 3

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious God, help us to lean into your love, grace and strength this day. May your vision take shape in us. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

This morning, I'd like to ask you a question. At the beginning of your adult life, if you were given the opportunity to open a letter that had within it every detail of what was going to happen to you and to those whom you love in the future, would you open and read that letter? Now what if I said that in opening this particular letter you would only gain knowledge. You could not change any of the events or your reaction to these events when they would occur. Would you still open that letter?

I think that I probably would not. Life can be overwhelming enough on a day to day basis and knowing what lies ahead, especially if it was to be challenging to us, may make us feel as if it's all too much to handle well. I believe, thankfully, God understands this reaction. I say this because in Ephesians, chapter 3, God reveals a secret that he has been holding on to since the beginning of creation. I believe God waited to reveal this mystery so as not to overwhelm, to frighten any of his children with what might feel like a monumental shift in thought or a monumental added responsibility. God waited until the right time to reveal this mystery.

The mystery that God shares finally in Ephesians, chapter 3, through the Apostle Paul, is this, that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs of God together with Israel. They are members together of one body and they share together all the hope and all the promises of Jesus Christ. That mystery is recorded for us in Ephesians, chapter 3, at verse 6.

Now pastor and author Eugene Peterson through his own paraphrase of the Bible, entitled "The Message", makes this mystery even clearer to us, when he writes, "The mystery is that the people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him, all their lives what I'm calling outsiders and insiders, stand now on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, the same help, the same promises, in Christ. This message is accessible and welcoming to everyone across the board."

Now the implications of this new vision and this broader invitation are good for everyone. For the Gentile, for anyone who is non-Jewish in background, this is truly a revelation! Those who have been called everything but a child of God, are now children and heirs of God through the reconciling work of Christ. For the child of Israel who grew up thinking that God's promise was to them alone and they had to be limited in their thinking, this is, in fact a dramatic invitation to broaden their horizons.

Last week in her sermon on Ephesians chapter 2, Ashley did a terrific job explaining the design of the temple in Jerusalem with its many dividing walls and courts and how these walls served as a visible sign of God's distance from anyone who was not an Israelite. In that sermon Ashley also shared how Christ broke down those walls, the dividing walls of the hostility and the barriers between Israelite and Gentile, between men and women, between priest and those who are not ordained. In Christ, God was gifting all people with a new vision of his temple, with Christ as the cornerstone.

In Ephesians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul reveals even more of this expanded vision of grace, this expanded vision of a growing family united together in Christ. Paul writes at verse 10 that now God's intention is to unite his family in one body as seen through the church. The church will be full of followers of Jesus who will share the extraordinary plan of God to the entire world.

Now this is a tall order! The church is charged with carrying on the work of the Apostle Paul in sharing that God's family is to be a community in which men and women, children of every race and color, social and cultural background, are to come together in glad worship of the one true God. The church is to reflect the multifaceted image of God and not our own image.

One biblical commentator, Ned Wright, boldly declares that the problem with most churches today is that we create societies and structures that are one-dimensional, that reflect our existence in the world. He calls them monochrome and boring, yet he says God does not "do boring". The church that God has designed and the blueprint which is laid out for us in Ephesians chapter 3 is the design of a church that is never static. It is always changing. The church changes every time someone comes into its fold; the church grows in love and in grace. One thing is for certain: The church is called to communicate God's message of love and grace, not only through its words, but most importantly through its actions.

This challenge is precisely what drives the Apostle Paul to his knees in prayer in verse 14 of Ephesians chapter 3. Paul writes, "For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name."

Paul asked God to strengthen those in the church with power, with God's power, and as Eugene Peterson translates in "The Message," this power is from *the Holy Spirit*. It is not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength by which God will equip the church. God will equip the church and strengthen the church as the church invites Christ to live within us. As we open the door and invite Christ in, we will know and experience that strength given to us by God, each and every single time we are able to take the focus off ourselves and our desires and our will for the church and instead focus on the inexhaustible resources of God's love and grace.

Again, one of my favorite scripture passages of all time comes at the end of Ephesians, chapter 3. The Apostle Paul writes, beginning in the second half of verse 17,

"I pray that you would have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and how long, and how high and deep is the love of Christ; to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Friends, this is a call for us to lean into the vast resource and ample supply of God's love! We are called to explore the hold that God's love has on us and on all whom we love. There is nowhere in this world, the Bible tells us, that we can go that is outside of God's love. There is no place out of this world, even in space, even in death, where we find ourselves outside of God's love and grace.

That grace-filled love is not only offered to us but to each and every person in the world. We, as a church, are called to see every person of every age and race and background as God does, as beloved children. If we are able to do that, maybe we will finally gain insight into the full measure of God's love for His people. If we feel that we struggle in doing that, which may be our natural inclination, then what we cannot do, we pray that God will help us do. God has promised exactly what to do when our power runs thin. God ends chapter 3 by almost knowing our hesitancy and almost predicting our challenge. The last words the Apostle Paul writes in that chapter are words that we need to hear this morning:

“To him who is able to do measurably more than you can ask or imagine, according to his power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.”

Then God will bless His church with His power, His love, and His grace. Thanks be to God that we get to be part of it! Amen.

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor — Introduction of Sacrament of Communion and Prayers of the People & The Lord's Prayer

As we gather around this communion table today, let us remember the words of our Lord, the one who said, “Come to me, all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gracious and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.”

Friends, as we gather at this communion table, let us lift up to God in prayer and know that everyone is welcome here. Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, that the bread we break and the cup we bless might be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Unite us, oh God, with the living Christ by the power of your Holy Spirit. Unite us with all who are baptized in his name that we might be one in ministry and every place.

As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world. With your grace, by the power of your Holy Spirit, God, help us to understand that our hearts' truest desire is to love you. May this love of Christ urge us on to walk by faith and with your love in our hearts.

We lift up this day all who suffer in mind, body, and spirit, all who are tired, all who are reaching the end of life, all who are hungry or thirsty, all who are poor, outcast, forgotten or marginalized, and all of those who are abused and neglected. Help us to be present with our sisters and brothers. Help us to seek your justice in this world and bring forth a new creation. Lead us, oh God, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Give us strength to serve you faithfully until the promised day of resurrection when, with the redeemed of all the ages, we will feast with you at your table in glory. As we await that time, bind us together in prayer as we recite the words that you have taught us to pray,

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Rev. Emily Campbell – Communion: Words of Institution

Friends, on the night that He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and, after He had given thanks to God His father, He broke it, saying, “This is my body which has been broken for you. Do this in memory of me.” In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup saying, “This cup is the new covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink from it, do so remembering me, for as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again. These are the gifts of God given to the people of God. Let us share this communion meal together.

Would you all please pray with me. Gracious God we praise you for gathering us from our separate homes and separate experiences of life into your one family. We thank you that your family is broad enough to include everyone. Today you have nourished our faith through this sacrament and provided us with a new vision for your church, as one body fueled by your love, by your power, and by your grace at work within us.

Please send us forth from here to be your witnesses. Strengthen us, help us, guide us, to share our hope and faith in Christ with the world. This we pray through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Joyful Ringers Bell Choir play “Fairest Lord Jesus”

Rev. Emily Campbell – Benediction and Blessing

And now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest on us all this day and forevermore. Amen.