



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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To the Saints and Faithful Ones in Messiah Jesus Ephesians 1:1-2 Fr. William Klock

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Last week I was on my gravel bike, riding the logging roads through the foothills to Campbell River and back while pondering St. Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus. As I passed the turn for Rossiter Mainline I was remembering the first time I made that gruelling climb. It goes up to the top of the north shoulder of Mount Washington, so it's not just a big climb; it's a steep climb. And it's a commitment. Round trip is over a 100km. I'd been looking at topographic maps and it looked to me that if you got up to the top, there ought to be a really spectacular view of the inland mountains you can't see from down here: Alberta Edward, Alexandra Peak, Golden Hinde. Maybe, I thought, you might even be able to see down to Buttle Lake. So off I went. In mid-March. And at about 600m of elevation, after the worst of the climbing, I hit snow. But I'd committed too much already so I kept pushing on. I rode in the ruts left by a lone truck that had been there recently. Then those ended and I pushed my bike through shin-deep snow. And the whole time I was looking *up* in expectation. And finally I got to the top. And what a let down. All I found was a huge gravel clearing in the trees where the logging trucks turn around to go back down the mountain. And the trees were tall and thick. There was zero view. Absolutely nothing to see. At all. I was not a happy camper. I was cold. My toes were wet and frozen. I was tired. It was about 60km home. At least a lot of it was downhill. So back down I went, through the trees, across the clear cuts, and then I rounded a

corner and the view took my breath away. It wasn't the view I expected. I was so focused on the view I expected at the top, I never thought to look behind me at the view of where I'd been. The real view was looking down over the Comox Valley and the Strait and over the coast range on the Mainland. And it was all snowy and green and blue. And as I stood there looking around, I noticed I was also looking down on at least half a dozen of my favourite gravel rides. I noticed, not only how different everything looked from above, but how those trails and logging roads weren't really how I imagined. I had a map of the mountain in my head that I'd got from ground level, but that bird's eye view changed a lot. It was really neat. It was worth the exhaustion and the wet, frozen toes.

I say this to introduce St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Lord willing, we'll be making our way through this six-chapter epistle over the next several months. And I think the best way to describe it is that it's the *unexpected* view from the mountain top. Emphasis on unexpected, because too often too many of us read Ephesians with the wrong expectations. Like me looking for one view and finding the real gem was an entirely different one. We've got Paul's other letters and he was always writing to a church in crisis. In Rome the Jewish and Gentile believers were splitting the church into factions. In Corinth they thought Christian liberty meant tolerating sin, engaging in chaotic worship, and abusing the Lord's Supper. In Galatia, fear of persecution and false teachers were tempting the people to retreat back into the Jewish law. But Paul didn't write to the Ephesians to address any particular crisis or problem they were having. He was in prison when he wrote. Maybe in Rome, in the early 60s, waiting to appeal his case to Caesar, but possibly right there in Ephesus in the early or mid 50s. It's hard to be sure. But he was in prison and he wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus and the surrounding cities to

encourage and exhort them. The church there had been established by Apollos, but Paul had been their pastor for about three years. He loved these people. He couldn't be with them. So he wrote to them. And what he wrote to them was about how to *be* the church.

All this makes Ephesians the perfect place to get a view of what the church is supposed to be. It's easy to get lopsided views if we put all the emphasis on, say, Romans or Galatians. This happened at the Protestant Reformation and the end result was that a lot of modern scholars decided that Ephesians probably wasn't written by Paul at all—because it doesn't fit with Romans and Galatians. *But*, if we let Ephesians take us up to the lookout on the mountain and look down on Romans and Galatians and Paul's other epistles from there, if we let that view shape how we read Paul's letters as a whole, everything starts to harmonise and make sense and it's easy to see that it really was Paul all along.

The structure of Ephesians is really pretty simple. In the first three chapters Paul writes about our calling as the church, as the people of God. And then, in Chapters 4 to 6 he writes about living that calling out. 4:1 is the pivot between the two. A lot of you probably know that verse by heart: "I appeal to you as a prisoner in the Lord, to walk in a way worthy of your calling." To walk. Some translations say "live". It's this wonderful Greek word *paripateo* that literally means "to walk around". It's a great image of life as we go our way, as we make our journey together as the church. Paul writes that as we embark on this journey of life as the Messiah's people it's essential that how we do it in a way worthy of our calling. But what does "worthy" mean. Here's another Greek word, *axios*. It's the idea of bringing a scale into balance. Picture an old-fashioned scale. You've got A on one side and to get it to balance out you've got to add just the right amount

of B to the other until they're both hanging at an equal height. Or, in modern terms, you might think of adjusting a crescent wrench, dialing it in, so that it perfectly fits the nut you need to unscrew. Or finding that pair of shoes or that dress or those pants that just fit *perfectly*. Not sort of fit. But perfectly fit. Like the balanced scale. That's *axios*. The calling we've been given by Jesus and the Spirit is hanging on one side of the scale. Now we've got to walk in such that we match it. That's a big ask. But Paul's also clear: We've got God's word to show us what and how and we've got God's Spirit to make it possible.

Brother and Sisters, that's Ephesians. Let your walk be worthy of your calling. And the emphasis isn't on "you" singular, but on "y'all" plural. He's talking to us as the church, as the people of God. Of course, that's going to have implications for us as individuals, but Paul's emphasis here is on our life together in Jesus and the Spirit. So...we're ready to jump into it...Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Paul writes: "Paul, an apostle of Messiah Jesus through God's purpose to the saints in Ephesus who are also faithful in Messiah Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah."

This is Paul's salutation, but even here he gets to the church's calling. He introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus the Messiah. In this case he doesn't dwell on his authority. He could have. He'd met the risen Jesus and had been given his calling to take the gospel to the gentiles, he could speak with authority as one of the eye-witnesses and as someone specially equipped for this apostolic ministry, but Paul doesn't need to do that here. He might do that, for example, writing to the Corinthians. He had to remind them of his credentials, because they'd sort of kicked him to the curb. But here he's writing to friends. I think Paul's main emphasis here is, instead, on the purposes or the will of God.

He'll come back to this idea of God's purposes in the verses that follow and especially in Chapter 3. But I think this is his real reason for bringing up the fact that he's an apostle. Because Paul knew that there was no way he ever would have found himself in this position if it hadn't been for God—and the same is true for the Ephesian Christians in their own ways. Remember, Paul was a Pharisee, he was a member of the governing council of the Jews, and he hated Christians with a passion. As far as he was concerned, Christians—at that point they were almost all Jewish—were traitors to their people and their God. They were following a man who had been crucified as a false messiah and Paul didn't believe for one second the reports that Jesus had been raised from the dead. When they stoned Stephen for preaching about Jesus, Paul held everyone's coats so that they'd be less encumbered throwing their stones. He was the last person who would ever become a follower of Jesus.

And then it happened. On the way to Damascus to round up more Christians, Paul met the risen Jesus. Not a ghost, not an apparition, not a dream, but the real and actual Jesus. And everything changed. It took Paul a good long while to sort out what it meant, but he knew from the beginning that if Jesus was really alive, then he really was the Messiah—the anointed King of Israel and the world's true Lord. It meant God's new age, his new creation had begun. Somehow. Some way. So Paul went off to Arabia by himself to think it all through in light of the scriptures and the story of Israel that he knew so well. And when he'd done that and came back, he knew: God had a plan all along. Jesus wasn't some fluke. He *was* the plan. Everything in history had been working *towards* Jesus and everything from now on would be working *from* Jesus. And just as God had had a purpose in calling Israel and making them his people to be a light to the nations, so it

meant that everyone who believed and found themselves part of this new Israel, part of this new people of God centred in Jesus the Messiah, they were part of God's continuing plan. Paul had been called and set apart as a messenger of this plan, but the Ephesian Christians were called and set apart in their own way as well, to live and to proclaim and to witness it.

So, remember that Ephesians is about what it means to be the church. Paul starts out reminding us that none of this is random. God had a purpose and that's why he's called us. Again, think of 4:1 right in the middle of Ephesians, where Paul reminds them (and us) to walk worthy of our calling—to walk according to the plan God has for us. Christianity isn't just some therapeutic thing that provides forgiveness of sins, a feel-good life, and heaven when you die. It's about being born again in Jesus the Messiah and then *credibly* living that new life, God's new creation, in the midst of the old, proclaiming the good news of the king and growing his kingdom until it fills the earth. The church, empowered by the Spirit of God, is Jesus means fulfilling the mission of renewal he began at the cross. So that's Paul's introduction of himself.

Next he addresses them. He calls them the saints who are also faithful in Messiah Jesus. First, saints. Paul's literally addressing the "holy ones". He's not singling anyone out, as if there were some especially holy people in the Ephesian church and he's writing to them and not to the rest of the ordinary Christians. He's talking about *all* of them. Brothers and Sisters, understand, holiness or sainthood isn't some status to be achieved that sets us apart from ordinary Christians. The Christian who struggles with sin every minute of the day is just as much a saint as the most mature of believers. It's not a status we earn. Holiness, sainthood is conferred on each of us by Jesus and the Spirit. To be holy is to be set apart. That's what Israel was: a

people set apart to fulfil God's purposes in the world. To be light in the darkness. He set them apart by giving them his law—a way of life that was different from everyone else in the world. And he gave them the visible mark of circumcision. He made them a holy people. Saints. And now, in Jesus the Messiah, God has done the same for us, for the church.

But before I get ahead of myself, there's the second thing Paul addresses them as. He calls them "faithful" or the "faithful ones". And it's important to understand what "faith" or "faithfulness" means, because we've often reduced it to just believing the right thing. We've got this idea that to be a Christian means believing the right thing about Jesus and about the good news of his death and resurrection. Jesus died for our sins and if we believe that, if we give our intellectual assent to it, well then, that's that. When I was a kid, our family was involved for a few years with an organisation with the mission to evangelise children. It was a popular programme, because the kids that signed up got to leave school early once a week. We'd walk over to a nearby church and we'd hear Bible stories and sing gospel songs and we'd hear about Jesus. And every week the leaders would close by inviting everyone to say a prayer with them to acknowledge Jesus as their Saviour. When they asked who prayed the prayer and kids raised their hands, they marked them down as successes. They were good to go. They'd said the prayer. They were Christians now. Except there was no discipleship. There was no church. There was no Christian community. Never mind, what all us Christian kids seemed to understand that the adult leaders didn't: Those non-Christians kids were just coming and were just raising their hands because they liked getting out of school early. Saying a prayer, even giving our intellectual assent to Jesus as Saviour, isn't being "faithful". For that matter, baptism alone isn't

"faithful" either. It's God's covenant sign that marks us out as his people—externally—but Paul is clear elsewhere that—as has always been the case for God's people in the old covenant and the new—it's *faithfulness* that truly marks us out. And faithfulness, yes, means belief, but it also means trust and loyalty and allegiance. As St. James writes in his epistle: faith without works is dead—it's not faith at all. Faith means walking worthy of our calling. Admire Jesus, confess Jesus all day long. Great. But until you've actually committed to him and *faithfully* start walking with him according to his plan, not yours, friend, you're not a Christian.

But then the key thing about all this. Paul doesn't just address them as the faithful saints. He addresses them—and us—as the faithful saints *in Messiah Jesus*. "In the Messiah". Paul uses that phrase a lot. He uses it in Ephesians more than he does anywhere else. And for Paul "in the Messiah" is shorthand for "belonging to the Messiah". Brothers and Sisters, you can't make yourself a saint. And if you're going to be faithful, you've got to be faithful to something. Jesus. Without him, we're wretched sinners, enemies of God, faithless and committed to idols to self and to sin and doing all the things that make this broken world broken. We serve ourselves and we worship idols. We hurt others, we abuse others, we use others for our own purposes. We break our relationships. We break our promises. We build unjust and unfaith systems and institutions. We exploit creation itself in unsustainable ways. We take no thought for the wellbeing of others or for generations to come, whether it's polluting the world they'll have to live in or running up obscene levels of debt that will leave them encumbered. Even Israel, called and set apart by God and given his law to make them a light in the darkness, even they ended up being all but swallowed by all this brokenness and darkness.

Enter Jesus. If you're following along in a Bible, you may have noticed that when I read our text and read the word "Messiah", your Bible probably reads "Christ". About ten years ago I made the decision to start using "Messiah" instead of "Christ" in my translations of the New Testament. I did that as I realised way too many people have no idea what "Christ" means and an awful lot of people think it's Jesus' last name. It's not. *Christos* is just the Greek word for the Jewish title, "Messiah". And "Messiah" refers to the anointed king that God had promised to his people through David and through the Prophets. The anointed king—meaning the king called and set apart as holy in order to fulfil God's purposes. That's who Jesus is. That's what the title "Christ" or "Messiah" means. Jesus is the one set apart by God to set this broken world to rights, to inaugurate God's new creation and the age to come and to rule it through his Spirit-renewed people until all his enemies have been put under his feet. And Jesus did this first by dying the death his people deserved. He didn't deserve it. They did. But he paid the wages of their sin. And then God raised him from the dead, defeating sin and death, and began the work of fulfilling God's promise to bring life back to a world mired in death. Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of God's new creation. And here's why Paul stresses that we are saints and faithful *in the Messiah*: because it is when we let go and turn away—that's "repentance"—when we turn away from sin and self, from our idols and false gods, rejecting the corrupted principalities and powers of this world, and instead believe the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, trusting him and giving him our loyalty and allegiance—our *faithfulness*—we find ourselves united with him. He forgives our sins and makes us holy. And—this is important for Ephesians and the whole question of what the church is and is

to be. Brothers and Sisters, Jesus' calling becomes *our* calling.

And that brings us back to the whole “walking worthy of our calling” thing. It brings us back to the fact that faith is more than just believing the right thing. Because if we believe that Jesus, when he rose from the dead has inaugurated God's new creation, that he's begun the process of setting this fallen world—and fallen humanity—to rights, that he's begun the process of wiping away the tears and making all the sad things of the world come untrue. That he has, as Paul highlights here, poured out his grace on us and given us peace—the Hebrew idea of *shalom*, of wholeness and of well-being rooted in our fellowship with God. Brothers and Sisters, it means that he's called us into that same messianic mission. He's made us heaven-on-earth people. In forgiving us and lifting the weight of our sins from us and in pouring his Spirit into us to give us a foretaste of the life to come, Jesus has given us a vision of this world set free from sin and death and a vision of life lived in God's presence and fellowship. Jesus has given us hope. And that's more than mere belief, it's more than intellectual assent to a creed. It's not less than that. But it's also so much more. It's life and it's hope. And not just for us. It's life and hope that, once we've known and experienced it, should become our passion. With the foretaste we've been given, with that hope before us, we ought to be a transformed people doing everything we can, with the help of the Spirit and following the scriptures, to be a people who forsake the sins and the selfishness that have made the world such a dark place; it ought to make us a people full of light and life, a people eager to bring God's grace and God's peace to everyone around us. To lift the veil on God's new world, to give them a glimpse of redemption and new creation, to share with them the hope we have.

Brothers and Sisters, remember that hope when you come to the Lord's Table this morning. Here he reminds us that Jesus changes everything. Here he reminds us that it is Jesus body and blood, shed on the cross, that purify us from sin. Here he reminds us that it is Jesus who makes us his people. And here he reminds us of the hope—the great feast of new life and fellowship with God—that is our hope. Come and remember that you are his saints. The ones made holy and set apart by Jesus to fulfil his purposes. And then go out into the world as the faithful ones, filled with grace and peace, equipped to walk worthy of your calling.

Let's pray: Almighty God, through Jesus your son, the Messiah, you have poured out your grace and your peace on us, you have forgiven our sins, you have welcomed us into your fellowship, you have given us hope; remind us, we pray, that you have also given us a calling, a purpose: to proclaim that Jesus is Lord to the ends of the earth, and be living, walking, breathing pockets of your new creation in the midst of the old. Make us faithful to that calling. Give us the grace necessary to turn aside from sin and from self and walk worthy of that calling; through Jesus the Messiah, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.