

The Meaning of Christ

God has called us to Communion this morning by a decision He made. He made the decision before He created the world. The love that fills and overflows His being led to this decision. It was the decision to create a worldwide community He could call “My people.” That’s us. Jesus Christ with whom we are about to commune by bread and wine carried out that decision. He emancipated His followers from guilt and lies and estrangement from God and constituted them as God’s worldwide community, the Church. The Church, God’s chosen people, is the key to the mystery of God’s will, which is **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.**

Being included in God’s eternal purpose anchors our lives in a future with God more certain than sunrise. Being included in God’s worldwide community gives us access to endless riches, and the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that sustains the Church in the face of evil and enables the Church to embody the full meaning of Christ for human life.

The Meaning of the Church

God had to create His beloved community out of people who were **dead in transgressions and sins.** **Dead** is the crucial word. To be **separate from, excluded from, foreigners to, and without** God and His purpose is spiritual death. That is humanity’s natural state.

So, God mounted a rescue operation. Jesus carried out that rescue by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. The biblical name for God’s costly kindness for people who don’t deserve it is grace. We remember and celebrate His grace and our rescue from spiritual death as we share the Lord’s Supper today.

We participate in God’s grace and receive spiritual life through faith in Christ. We believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, we say publicly, “Jesus is Lord,” we are baptized into His name, and we stay loyal to him as long as we live. Faith unites us with Christ, joins us to the people of God in covenant with God, and gives us an enduring hope. We are alive. The Bible calls the entire process – from God’s decision before the world began to the death of Christ to the most recent baptism and forward to the New Jerusalem – salvation. Jesus Christ has saved us from spiritual death.

Christ brings us rescued ragamuffins together into God’s worldwide community, the Church, with a clear purpose in mind. Remember the mystery of His will: **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.** God intends for the Church to anticipate this coming unity of all things in Christ. We know God intended this thanks to an age-old conflict between Jews and non-Jews, whom we call Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles were oil and water; they were apples and oranges. Many Gentiles despised Jews, and many Jews returned the favor. The apostle said that Christ brought them together. They couldn’t agree on the time of day, but they agreed on Christ.

Something unprecedented happened in synagogues and house churches. Little bands of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus met together to worship Him. It wasn’t easy. They disagreed about how believers should spend their time on the Sabbath. They disagreed on what food Jesus people should eat. They disagreed about where to buy their meat. They disagreed and could be disagreeable, but they worshipped Jesus together and tried to get along.

The unthinkable was happening, and as a result the wisdom of God took its precarious perch in the crucible of experience. There was not to be a Jewish Church and a Gentile Church. There was to be one Church, one body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13) Red and yellow, black and white, Christians were all **members together of one body**. There is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

And there is more. In Christ **the whole body is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord**. From the day Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, He has been the Architect, who designs and oversees the building of God's worldwide community. He is building a temple, and we are that temple.

And here's the wonder of it all: In Christ the whole Church is **being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**. The Church is God's home away from heaven. It is His dwelling place on earth. "The flesh of the *Church* is the abode of the divine presence in the world. It is the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation." (Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, 256) That is the Church's calling. That is our calling: to be the flesh in which God lives in this world.

Only God can give us what we need to live up to that calling. What we need from Him more than our next breath is the strength to know that Christ loves us. The prayer of Ephesians 3 is a prayer for just that. Knowledge of His love for us is the secret to how the Church can embrace its calling to be the flesh in which God lives in this world.

Worthy of the Calling

The preceding points to the elegant and unchanging nature of the Church, which Ephesians reveals. That's you the Apostle was talking about. You are the flesh in which God lives in this world. Whoever you think you are and whatever gives your life meaning pale in comparison to your calling as a member of the Church. The truth about the Church challenges the tawdry ideas we have of the Church, and it challenges the tawdry behavior of the Church. The apostolic vision of the Church is an invitation to see the Cinderella hidden behind the grime of our barely converted human nature and the strutting pride of the unconverted world. The vision of the Church in Ephesians 1-3 is nothing if not sublime.

However, we experience the Church at street level. Ephesians 4-6 gives us expert guidance in how to shape our street level experience of being the flesh in which God lives in this world. The apostle's organized his expert guidance around three governing ideas: the unity of the Church, the new attitude and lifestyle of the Church, and the spiritual warfare of the Church.

As you hold in your hands the bread and wine and commune with Christ, would you make a promise to Christ that you will do all in your power to remember the Church's calling and to learn and live out those three governing ideas?