

Ephesians 2:1-22 “Once was Lost, But Now Am Found!”- Rev. Amanda A. Nevin

Introduction: Last week we started our journey through the Book of Ephesians. Paul begins his letter with a greeting, a greeting to old and new friends alike. Paul starts the letter by proclaiming to the Christians in Ephesus what their identity is in Christ. He Reminds them that they are the children of God adopted into God’s family and given the riches of God’s grace through the works and person of Christ. God chose us before the foundations of world and called us his own. Paul is reminding the Christians of their high calling as the sons and daughters of God because they have been given grace upon grace which calls us to a high standard of living in this world and in our community of faith. Our passage this morning is a continuation of this theme of grace and mercy that we have been given through Christ.

Read the Passage:

Paul starts off this section of the letter on a rather sober note. Last week we were inspired about our identity in Christ, that we are God’s children chosen before the foundations of the world to have the inheritance of God’s riches because of the work of Christ. And then we come to chapter 2. Paul starts this chapter by telling us that we are dead in our sins and for Paul that means our sins have kept us from a relationship with God. He says “you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived.” Paul wants us to understand that people who stuck or trapped in sin are far from God and can have no communication or relationship with God. Those people are physically alive, but their sins have rendered them spiritually unresponsive, alienated from God, and thus incapable of experiencing the fullness of all that God could give us. Before Christ we were alienated from God; our sin and our transgressions kept us spiritually and physically dead. Without Christ we all lived according to our flesh, according to our sinful nature and our sinful desires. The word “live” can also be translated as “walk” describing the conduct of our lives. In other words before Christ we walked in sin; we walked in our sinful desires instead of walking with God. Instead of moving toward God, those who have not accepted Christ can only move in one direction- away from God, and when we are away from God we remain in sin. As a result we live like the rest of the world and if we are following the rest of the world we cannot also follow Jesus. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Throughout the ages, humans have lived in sin and disobedience and continue to do so without Christ. Each and every one of us still leave with the reality that we are a sinful and broken people in need of a savior. Paul is reminding us that no one is “good” enough to earn salvation. Yes people can do “good things” for others, we can be kind, we can be gracious, we can love regardless of a faith in God and yet sin still corrupts everything- our actions, thoughts, desires, will and reasoning. Often we think we can do generous and kind things out of pure motives but always lingering in the back of our minds whether we recognize it or not are those thoughts of “how will this make me look,” “what will I get in return” or even “I hope God sees this and rewards me for my good behavior.” Even in those 3 statements we have sinned, we have fallen short of God’s glory. Paul wants to remind us of the depth of where we have come from- we are sinners, we live by a sinful nature, we are far from God’s reaches without Christ. In our world today we like to forget the “sin” word. We have fallen into the trap that sin really isn’t that bad of a word, that overall people are generally good- we “just mess up” every once and awhile. WE like to be face to face with those traits and personalities flaws we

don't like in ourselves. We want to believe that we aren't greedy, we don't lie; that we don't really steal from others; that we don't break the law; that we aren't a jealous people; that we don't have evil thoughts about others. We would rather see the rosy side of things. And yet when we don't focus on those things that we do wrong, when we don't recognize the ways that we sin and call it sin we kid ourselves about our need for a savior. We take for granted our faith in God and the grace we have been given by Christ because we sugar coat the reality. Every time we go over the speed limit we sin because we break the law; every time we are jealous of another's belongings or fortunes in life we sin; every time we allow money to become the heart of an issue we sin; every time we gossip or share news that is not ours to share we sin, every time we ignore the poor, overlook injustices that are happening, don't turn the other cheek but have anger that is not a righteous anger we sin. Sin is a real part of all of our daily lives whether we like to use the phrase or not. Paul wants to remind us our sinfulness; he wants us to remember that we were once strangers from God; we were far off- away from God's graces and we were aliens doing our own thing before Christ.

Why does Paul begin this way? I think to put a mirror in front of each of us. Paul wants us to take a hard look at ourselves, he wants to remind us of where we once were so that might fully understand and appreciate the cost of the cross. For Paul, if we understand the depths of our "wretchedness," the depths of our alienation from God then we will better understand the fullness of his grace through the person and the works of Jesus Christ.

A story is told about Fiorello LaGuardia, who, when he was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII, was called by adoring New Yorkers 'the Little Flower' because he was only five foot four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who used to ride the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department, take entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he would go on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "***It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor.***" the man told the mayor. "***She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson.***" LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said "***I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail.***" But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying: "***Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Baliff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant.***"

So the following day the New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered old lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren, fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced grocery store

owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation. Friends that is the essence of grace! It recognizes our wretched condition; it pays our debt and it gives us more than we could ever have imagined.

What Paul wants us to know is that through grace, through Christ's work and gift on the cross we can have new life. Only through being united with Christ's perfect life can we become "good" in God's sight. Only through the work of Christ can we truly experience and understand grace. For we were dead, trapped in our sins; far from God and without hope before Christ. There is no way any one of us could pay the debt; no way we can even be good enough on our own to mend the broken relationship with God after sin entered in. Yes we still struggle with sin; yes we will all continue to sin and fall short of God's glory but now because of the work and person of Christ we can have forgiveness. Whereas before Christ came God would see us only through our sin he now sees us through the lens of Christ's sacrifice. Without the sacrifice of Christ we are nothing. God who is rich in grace is rich in mercy and loving kindness. Because of God's great love for us we can now approach Him, seek forgiveness and continue to have forgiveness and a relationship with the Lord of the universe. Though we were once dead we are now alive because of Christ's offering on the cross. God did not require us to be "good" enough before he reached down to save us; he made us alive when we were dead in our sins. This work of Christ is a gift to all who would believe. It is only through faith, only through our belief in Christ that this is made possible. That is what grace is about- we don't have to "earn" salvation. We don't have to go out and do x,y, or z to get God's attention and love. We don't have to be "perfect" all the time in order to receive grace and mercy- we are given it simply out of God's loving act which was sacrificing his perfect son for us- so that we might have life and have it in abundance. Paul takes us to the bottom to show us where we were without Christ in order to reveal to us the gift that we have been given. By showing us how far away we are and from God without Christ, the hope is that we will be all the more grateful and will understand more deeply the gift we have been given.

There is an expression that says "when you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he didn't get there by himself." It's obvious that someone had to put the turtle up there. In one sense Christians are turtles on fence posts put there by the grace of God. For without God we can do nothing. Without Christ we are nothing and incapable of climbing the fence post on our own. We need God's help and grace to lift us up out of the muck, out of our sin and place us firmly on his fence post of grace. Once we have seen and experienced God's grace, once we truly looked in the mirror and recognize all that we have been given and accepted this grace as the greatest gift we will ever be given then we are called to respond and live accordingly. Without Christ we were strangers lost and far from God, blinded by our sin, dead in our relationship with God. But now we are found, we can see because of Christ and are given new life. How will you respond to this good news? How will you with this grace?