

TO DWELL OR NOT TO DWELL (Ephesians 2, 11-22)  
Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges, Sunday, July 19, 2009, SJOC

- I. One of my favorite games when I was a kid was Mikado, the German version of Pick Up Sticks.
  - A. I remember taking turns with my brother and mother, trying not to disturb the pile and remove a stick. Two important sticks: the 40-pointer.
  - B. It was inevitable, but one of us always got down to that second imp. stick, you know the one...the stick that holds the pile together and if it is removed the whole stack comes tumbling down.
  - C. Sticks would lie scattered, it would be the other person's turn and they could finish off the game and collect the rest of the sticks and points one by one.
  
- II. Ephesians today—Christians united together under the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ's death
  - A. Church as a building/structure, with humanity as the citizens/members of the household
  - B. Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets
  - C. Jesus as the:
    - 1. Cornerstone—the important stone (just like that crucial stick we all tried not to disturb), the one that makes the building secure
    - 2. Capstone—completes the building
    - 3. Cornerstone is necessary at beginning for a strong base, but the capstone is the final touch, the one that pulls it all together
    - 4. Does Christ have to be one or the other? Don't we need him from the start to the finish and every step in between?
  
- III. Bible study the last two weeks, discussion has been on unity, spec, diversity in unity
  - A. How can we be/remain one when we do not agree?
  - B. Important question for national church these days, but also for us in our everyday lives, for we all have to deal with conflict and people who do not see things the way we do
  - C. As Bishop Little writes in his book "Joy in Disguise", "the question we're facing as a Christian community is not whether we disagree about matters but how we do so."  
Some of suggestions of our group were:
    - 1. Agree to disagree
    - 2. Try to keep in mind God's bigger picture, not our smaller one
    - 3. Trust that God will reconcile the matter
    - 4. Instead of focusing on our divisions, as we so often do, focus on how we complement each other—key in building up body of Christ
    - 5. Appreciate and value diversity—variety of gifts, experience, knowledge and wisdom. Recognition that we are stronger united than divided
    - 6. In terms of our reading today and using the building imagery, we need to ask: Are we allowing Christ to hold us together as a Chr. Community (the church: locally, regionally, nationally and internationally) or are we going our own separate ways?
    - 7. How are we being built together into a dwelling place for God?
  
- IV. Dwelling
  - A. Once in ceramics class we were given the assignment of creating "dwellings."  
I remember as we all kind of looked at each other thinking, "What in the world is a dwelling?" First had to define it: A home, an abode, a space where people reside. Then envision it: Each thinking, what should my dwelling look like and how should I build it? It

was interesting to see what different people came up with.

- B. When we add to the assignment to create in ourselves a dwelling place of God, that adds even more confusion...or does it?
- C. St. Paul gives us some instruction on how to do this. A dwelling place for God should be:
  1. A place without walls of division or hostility: Christ came to break down the walls that divide God's people. We need to keep those walls from being built up again.
  2. Peaceful place: He is to have made one new humanity in place of two, creating peace and reconciling God's people in one body—we need to work for the continuation of this peace
  3. Spiritual place: Through Christ, all sides have access in one Spirit to the Father—we need to recognize that the Holy Spirit is available to all in God's house, not just ourselves

V. Although the image of the church as a structure is helpful, the fact is that church is so much more than that. The church is a wide, diverse group of people trying to follow Christ to the best of their abilities in their daily lives. This is not an easy thing to do, esp. since:

- A. God did not make us all alike with the same opinions and callings and God gave us free will to make our own decisions
- B. But the crucial part of the picture that we cannot forget is Jesus. Christ has to remain in the middle.
  1. It's like that delicate game of pick-up-sticks and that main stick on which all the others depend
  2. When we remove Christ from the picture (or building or community we call the church), the whole thing comes tumbling down
  3. Like our Jeremiah reading remind us, we become like scattered sheep without a shepherd, lost and with no where to go, not knowing who to trust

VI. Regarding that Mikado game I played as a child, you might ask where my father was when we played--well often he chose not to play at all. It just wasn't his thing.

- A. Is that an option for us when we encounter conflict and disagreement? Can we just walk away and not engage the other?
- B. I think not. God does not let us off the hook that easily. Christ holds all of us together.
- C. In Christ, the whole structure is bound and grows into the holy temple of the Lord. To continually grow like this, we have to put our relationships with other members of the household of God first. We have to keep coming back to the table, as many times as it takes, tearing down those walls of hostility and working for God's peace.
- D. I desperately want to be a dwelling place for God, a place where God resides and is felt and experienced in this world. How about you? To do so, we have to look at our own hearts and intentions, what we are doing. We have to ask ourselves each and every day how we are fostering God's love and building up God's holy temple. May God give us the fortitude to create within us open and loving minds, bodies and hearts in which God does dwell.