

## Spacious family home, built to last (St Ronan's, 22 July 2018)

Ephesians 2:11-22

Reference also made to story read earlier in service: *Because I Love You* by Max Lucado.

Buildings, walls, cornerstones, foundations – no it's not a media release about affordable housing or seismic strengthening, it's the apostle Paul writing to God's people in Ephesus.

Paul talks several times about a church building, but of course he doesn't mean a physical one like the one we are in this morning – he means a building made of people.

He may have used the analogy of walls, foundations and cornerstones because that was what the Temple and other important buildings in Jerusalem were like, or because many people at the time built their own houses, and were familiar with the terms.

But before he wrote about the structure of the spiritual building, he explained about the people who would become the stones – how would they become:

- 1) citizens of God's Kingdom and
- 2) members of God's family?

In the first part of Ephesians 2, before the reading we heard earlier, Paul explains how we become **reconciled with God**.

God created us and, despite our shortcomings, through **our** belief and **his** grace he made us citizens of his kingdom.

Paul goes on to tell us how we become **reconciled with each other** and join God's family.

The Temple of Jerusalem was built in a way that encouraged hostility. There were physical barriers to keep certain people separate, such as priests, worshippers and women. Anyone could go into the outer court, called the Court of Gentiles, but foreigners and non-Jews could not go further into the temple. If they went beyond the wall, they were put to death.

But Paul says that Jesus changed all this. In Eph 2:14 we read "For Christ himself has brought peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them and kept them enemies."

Verse 18 says "It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one spirit into the presence of the Father."

In other words, through Jesus, **all** believers are members of God's family, all are brothers and sisters with the same Father. Like the children in the story we heard earlier – they were all equal in Shaddai's eyes.

In effect, the Temple in Jerusalem had been the focus of God's people for 1000 years – but the death and resurrection of Jesus created a new united worldwide family that needed a new temple.

Although Jesus broke down the wall that separated different believers, making them one family, the members of that family have since built their own walls to separate out different groups. We call them denominations! They have built other walls of tradition, ritual and language that separate believers from believers, believers from non-believers.

In the last few verses of Chapter 2, Paul talks about the new universal church as being one of people, but he used the image of a building to illustrate the relationship between the various parts.

Here in NZ we know the need for good foundations. Not just strong ones, but ones able to absorb the destructive energy of an earthquake, like the base isolators under Te Papa and other buildings.

Most of you will be familiar with Jesus' illustration of a house built on a rock compared with one built on sand. This was to show that Jesus is a strong foundation for **individuals** – but Paul talks about a strong foundation for the **church as a whole**.

Eph 2:20 “You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets.”

The apostles knew Jesus, and the prophets in this sense refers to a group of teachers close to the apostles.

Paul, later in Ephesians 4:11 refers to people Jesus appointed and empowered through the Holy Spirit: “He appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ.”

So the apostles and prophets who Paul called the foundation of the spiritual church fulfilled this role because of their teaching, which was itself founded in Jesus and made possible through the Holy Spirit. Their teaching is the foundation, the basis of what we believe.

What they taught came from Jesus and is preserved in the Scriptures – so if we move away from what is in the scriptures, we are in danger of eroding the foundation of the Christian faith. Nowadays there are many different ways of ‘doing church’ – sadly, some of these ‘expressions’ of church have shifted off the scriptural foundations.

On Wednesday I went for a sunny walk along the beach near Raumati – some houses are in a rather precarious position already, others **seem** to be set far enough back, but constant nibbling by the sea will destroy them in the end.

I think we need to guard against attitudes and actions that might lead us to cause **God's** house to crumble in places, or cause us to leave it. Paladin in the story we heard earlier found nothing wrong with the world beyond the wall – to start with. Then little things, just rustles and snaps in the forest, eroded his confidence and built up until he became afraid.

Ephesians 2: 20 tells us that the **cornerstone** of the church is Jesus himself. This was in fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 28 (and other places) “This, now is what the Sovereign Lord says “I am placing in Zion a foundation that is firm and strong. In it I am

putting a solid cornerstone on which are written the words “Faith that is firm is also patient.” Justice will be the measuring line for the foundation, and honesty will be its plumb-line.”

1<sup>st</sup> slide

The cornerstone used to be the first and most important stone in a stone building. It was chosen carefully, because the lines of the adjacent walls relied on it. If the cornerstone was removed, the building could collapse.

2nd Slide

In some more recent buildings the term cornerstone refers to whole corner structures that define the shape of the building. In this example from Port Arthur, the 19<sup>th</sup> century convict settlement in Tasmania, the cornerstones were made of the strongest, most durable material (stone). The walls were made of many smaller, weaker handmade bricks, which relied on the cornerstones for stability.

Here in New Zealand we don't use cornerstones much now. I suppose the modern equivalent would be the wooden frame of a house – this sets the dimensions and alignment of the house. Other components such as weatherboards and gib hang on it – take the frame away and the walls collapse.

So we have a strong foundation and a cornerstone - what is needed next are the many stones that make up the walls. Like the little bricks that made up that building in Port Arthur.

Eph 2: 22 – In union with him you are all being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his spirit.

Peter put it clearly in 1 Peter 2:5 “Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple.”

Something modern builders need to take into account is the Building Code - a set of rules that specify the standards that constructed buildings must conform to. The Bible is like a book of building codes, detailing a set of standards that **Christians** should conform to. So we need to be familiar with the Bible.

Christians are to pray, meet together, tell the unsaved about the Good News, live godly lives, love their neighbours and much, much more.

So, the spiritual house of God, His Church, is strong and lasting because of:

its cornerstone (Jesus),

its foundation (the Jesus-based teaching of the apostles and prophets)

its stones (You, me, God's people united as one family)

I love the idea of a spiritual building made of living stones – the whole structure is a living building. The church started with a small band of followers, mostly ordinary fishermen, and now it is spreading around the world. It won't be completed until the day that Jesus returns.

In these days of factory-line prefabs and quick-build affordable housing, it's wonderful to know that the house of **God's** people expands to fit the one big family that creates it.

The house is available to everyone; there is waiting list.

There's an Open Home all day, every day

And there is no mortgage – Jesus has already paid for it in full.