

“A Construction Zone”
1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30;
Matthew 5:1-16, Ephesians 2

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow
July 1, 2012

As we move into this second chapter of Ephesians, I would like to think about being a young man or woman in Ephesus so many years ago when this letter was written. I wonder what it would have been like to begin to grow up in that place. In many ways, in that world, what family you were born into was what determined who everyone expected you to be when you grew up. In a poor family, you could expect a life of servitude. If you grew up in a rich family, you could expect to have the benefits of society. There were all kinds of things that went along with where you were born. As one grew up, there was that expectation of who they might become. There was as they grew, a path for them perhaps. But even in that time, I suspect, that there were decisions to be made. How much do I align myself with the cult of Artemis? Do I become part of this little political faction or that little political faction? Do I accept the way things are or do I try to push back? Do I join Apollos group? So there was all of that work to be done.

You know, as we grow up, we have to decide who we are going to be, who we are going to be with, what kind of groups we are going to gather with. Who are we going to let help form our identity? It's just human nature to do identity formation as we grow up. Today we might say it's our ego identity. Yet, as we grow up we begin to create our identity because of the family we're in, the society we're around, the culture that forms us, the choices that we have before us. By those choices we begin to build our lives. Since there is this building metaphor in this passage today, I want to think about this metaphor because I think that idea of growing up and having something that we are forming. We have this thing that we are carrying with us that we are trying to place. So if you have ever done new building construction once the foundation is down, you have to put down a sill plate so that you have things to hammer the rest of it to. Imagine holding a six foot long board that could be a sill plate. What I was thinking about is in many ways when we are doing our identity formation it's like we're carrying around our sill plate. We're trying to find out where it goes, where we might begin to build our lives. Think about what it would be like for a bunch of us to be carrying these long boards around and assume we all wanted to go down the sanctuary aisle. Now, if we cooperate and keep them the right direction, we could come and go. We could do it. However, if someone decided they wanted to be a little different and turn the board sideways, they could mess up the whole works. Or, if you're not careful, you might have an accident. Does it ever feel that way sometime with our own egos? We carry them around. If we want to go different directions, we'd have to talk about it. I think sometimes as we get older we get a little better at moving these things around.

Now the interesting thing is what I think is happening here in Ephesians is we are being told that in many ways we have been carrying these around with us. When we have a lot of us together trying to negotiate each one, we get stuck. In fact, if we are in a group going one direction to change directions is really tough. It feels like we are stuck. We are dead in our trespasses. We've gone off in the wrong direction. It's easy to get

stuck if we are all trying to do this at once. Then there is this voice, encouraging us to come over here and put this down. Of course, there are a lot of voices saying that. It is when we hear the voice of God in Christ through Paul, when we hear the good news, we recognize there is a gift of someone loving us, inviting us, telling us we have a foundation in the apostles and prophets. We have a chief Cornerstone that we can set this down upon. We can put it down. We found the place it goes, the foundation upon which we can build. We've saved by grace. We're given a place to put our sill plate, our lives, to begin to build our identities.

Now, just because I'm saying this about young people, I don't think that it only applies. I think that through our lives we may get the sill plate down but then we go out and get more building materials. We have more life experiences. We can get stuck just as easily. We can get stuck either by saying, "I don't think I have anything to bring," but Christ always invites us to come. He can always help us build somehow. We'll be given nails. We'll be given the opportunity to make joints, to help be the joints, to help others put their material up. There is always stuff to be done in the household of God. But we can also get stuck in our accomplishments. "Wow, I found these great building materials and I won't let them go. They're great!" We have an invitation to come and build on that foundation that God has given us. You see, it's a grace that God has given us this foundation to build on, to put down our sill plate and to put our self identity in Christ and through him begin to understand what it means to be free. Think about just the idea of setting the sill plate down and now being able to walk around.

You know, having a foundation is so important. As we celebrate the 4th this week, what we're celebrating is that our country has a foundation. We have a constitution. We have a way of being. This is a call to recognize a foundation that I think is even deeper that must hold up even that one. A foundation on which we can truly build our lives. Grace is the invitation to come and put it down. By grace, through faith we are saved. What is the faith part of that? It's the trust, it's the setting it down. Claire's example in the children's sermon this morning that grace is throwing out the life preserver and faith is grabbing ahold of it. That's the faith part, trusting that we've been given a foundation on which to build. Paul goes on to say, "And we build our lives." It's not about making a foundation. We can't by our own good works make a foundation that makes it a place to build. That's God's work. He's done it. Now, we are made for "good works." We are made to keep building, to build this up.

There are two ways that are talked about in this passage. One is the good works that we do. Think about the gifts we have been given. So, I have the gift of writing. I can write things that are valuable/helpful or I can write things that are hurtful. I have the gift of a quick tongue. I can say things that are hurtful or I can say things that are helpful. I have the gift of humor. I can say things that help people experience that humor together or that divide. You see? We've been given the ability to do good works with the gifts we've been given. That is to bring more building materials to what is already being built, to recognize as we are building it that we can get enamored with our particular section. We think this is it. So what does Paul go on to talk about? What Christ does is take the barriers that are between us, that we think we have the best

section or how we might look at someone else's section and wish ours was that good and recognize that it is not about that. It's not about looking at others and differentiating ourselves. It's about looking to Christ and allowing all of our lives to be defined by his grace and love. To recognize that whatever blame we might want to assign, rivalries we might have had, reasons we had for dividing ourselves, whether we thought our part or another was the best, in God's kingdom that is not what it is about. It's that we're all building the same building. We're one new humanity. That's what it says in Ephesians. We are one body. We're all together.

We've talked about being able to have a foundation, to set our sill plate down. We've talked about what kind of things help build it: good works and allowing Christ to break down the walls that divide us. But usually when you build something, you have a blueprint first. You decide what you're building before you start building. I went backwards. I started building it, talking about how you build it but what's being built? The interesting thing is that what is being built is the very household of God. Look at those last couple of verses. What is being built is the household of God. Spiritually, we are being built into the household of God, a place where God can come and dwell with us. We're not really taking bricks and making a house the way they did in that original temple. It's not a literal building. A literal sill plate. It's about how we fit together and make the very temple of God, a place God dwells. Isn't that incredible? It is as we come and recognize that grace that God has given us, build upon the foundation that God has given us what we're building is the very community of faith, the place God dwells. As we build this particular place that God dwells, we become part of a bigger part of God's dwelling with us. We as a church are setting down our own sill plate, being part of the very work of Christ in the world. So it's the invitation that God gives to come and build together through the good works we do, by the faith we share, by the work of Christ breaking down boundaries and borders and sharing together around the table, we become the household of God, God's holy temple, a place God dwells. Let's do it. Amen.