

March 3, 2013 - You Belong Here.

We are starting a new series today. We finished up our last series last week and so we are going to start a new series this morning. Always the first lesson in a series we have to do some stage setting and some background so that's what we're going to do for the most part this morning. Just to prime the pump, if you would, for what's going to come in the coming weeks. I hope that you find that encouraging and hopefully by the time you get to the end of our time this morning, you will be anxious to see what comes next and you're anxious to see what the weeks ahead will bring. So that's our goal this morning.

About a year and a half ago we were on our way to Calgary and we took a detour on the way and stopped at Drumheller to see the dinosaur museum there and as you can see, it kind of floored our kids a little bit. They were quite excited to be there and to see all the artefacts and all the things that were there. My only memory is that there were a whole bunch of cottonwood trees in the parking lot and so, I'm allergic to cottonwood, so I was miserable the whole time. But the kids loved it, which was good. As we were walking through the museum, at one point we were walking along and I just happened to look down at the floor, and I saw a little sign that told me I was 'there' (sign read "You are here"). I don't know how particularly helpful that was for me, in the moment, to know that I was standing on that spot but this familiar little red dot with the words "You are Here" pops up every now and then in different places, you will see it on the information signs in the Mall. There will be a little dot that says "You are Here" or perhaps on a map you will have that same kind of marking that lets you know where you are in relation to everything else. Actually, even before service starts, we have slides showing and we have our own little red dot that tells us where you are when you are watching the slide show and everything else in relation to that. Now sometimes the "You are Here" dot isn't quite as helpful as at other times (slide of sign in the North...all snow around). Really I think at other times it isn't as helpful as I would like it to be in locating things, because really, in life when it comes to that same question or that same idea of where you are, at least for me in life, that question is less about "where exactly is here?" the bigger question for me is "What is here like?" What is it like here? What is this place that I am currently standing in like? What is the environment here? What are the rules here? What are the expectations here? What are some of the benefits to me if I stay here? Those are some of the questions that dominate my mind more than anything else. Perhaps you even feel that way when you come to Church sometimes and you may ask those questions. What is it really like 'here'? What are the rules here? What are the expectations here? What are some of the benefits to me, if I stay here? You don't actually be a first time visitor to be asking those questions. You may have grown up in Church. You may have been away from Church for awhile and are considering coming back to church. Or who knows you may have attended church faithfully for years, and years, and years, and yet, you still ask those same kind of questions. What is church really supposed to be like? What is church really supposed to be all about? What is church supposed to do for me? And What am I supposed to do as part of the church? Well, over the next several weeks, those are some of the questions we would like to try and tackle.

You may be familiar with the slogan of the Olive Garden Restaurant which says “When You are Here You are Family” and so I wondered this week, what if we took that same slogan for ourselves and instead of what we have printed on our sign currently, what if we re-printed our sign and filled it in with the new slogan: “When You are Here You are_____” What would you fill in that blank? There are a lot of things we could probably put in that blank. A lot of very good things we could put in that blank. Some of the people probably have experiences that they would come along and write some negative things in that blank. But that’s the question we want to answer over the next several weeks. What kind of things go in that blank? Most importantly, What kind of things does God want to see filling in that blank? And so, to do that, we’re just going to look at a few of them, it won’t be exhaustive that list of things, but we’re going to look at a few things and to do that, what we want to do is listen to the words of Paul which he spoke to the Church at Ephesus many years ago. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul spends much of his time explaining what the Church is meant to be, and to do. And so, what we want to do over the next several weeks is examine his instructions, and apply them to Saskatoon in 2013.

Now, lots of times we don’t have the opportunity to do this, but this time around, I thought it might be helpful for us if before we got into the actual Letter to the Ephesians, we took a little time to understand the City of Ephesus that Paul was writing to. And so, if you will permit me, this morning we’re going to take a real whirlwind tour through the City of Ephesus and try to get a grasp on who the Church was and what time of context Paul was writing to. So, this is an actual Google Maps picture of the City of Ephesus. It probably doesn’t look like much to you from there, but I’ll give you a little help. It was built between two hills and so that kind of gave it some protection from people around them. So that’s where the ancient city was built. You can see three major streets that run through the City. This street right here is called the Marble Street. Can you guess why it’s called the Marble Street? It’s built out of marble. The whole road built out of marble bricks and you can see some marble buildings and facades and columns along the side of that road and so, it’s quite incredible to see this long stretch of road built out of marble. I can’t imagine us today, can you imagine us building our roads out of marble? It’s a pretty incredible thing. So this is actually something spectacular to see, this marble road in Ephesus. But more significantly perhaps is this road here, and this road is called the “Acadian Road”. And it is 530 Metres long, 11 metres wide, and one of the most notable things about this is, I am told there were 60 lights lining the sides of the streets, so every night the street would be lit up, which was actually something quite rare back in the First Century for streets to be so well lit. Acadia Avenue, was actually also known as Harbour Road. You want to guess why it was known as Harbour Road? Because it led to the Harbour, right. And as you look at this picture you would think “Oh! That dark area must be the harbour, but in fact, in this picture, that dark area is trees. If you look at the map today, if we zoom out a little bit, the coast line is actually way over here about three miles away from where the ancient City of Ephesus is. What has happened over the last 2,000 years is, that the silt has kind of filled in the Bay that the City was built on and so now, it’s all land three miles out to the Coast. Interesting little side-back, that has changed the dynamics of the City and that is one of the reasons why the City of Ephesus doesn’t exist anymore where it did because the harbour

has dried up and it's gone away.

So, back in the First Century, the City of Ephesus was one of the most important Roman Cities in the area. The population of the City of Ephesus in the First Century was 250,000, which I thought was quite interesting because that's almost the same as the City of Saskatoon. And so, I thought "Wow! That's really interesting. Something for us to relate to. And at that time, 250,000 was a big city for the area it was definitely the biggest city in that region and one of the biggest cities in the Roman Empire, at that time. 27 A.D. which is just before the time Jesus started his public ministry, Rome made Ephesus it's Capital for that whole Province. So Ephesus was just coming into being a very prominent and very important City and it was actually, you may not think this, but it was very technologically advanced. I showed you pictures of the marble street before and what's significant about that is that, the sewer was running under the street instead of in the gutters of the street. And this was a fairly new revelation for them. And this was a fairly big deal, fairly technologically advances for them to run the sewers under the street instead of in the gutters. And as you can imagine, there are some definite perks to that sort of thing. As they have excavated things they have actually found a shop that had a water-powered, marble-cutting, machine. Now, I don't know exactly what it looks like, but I am told that's the only one they found. And so, obviously again, some technology happening in Ephesus that kind of puts it a little bit ahead of other cities at that time.

Probably one of the most significant or impressive things in the City is this place here, and it's called the Celcus Library. It was, at the time of it's prime, it held 12,500 books, obviously in scroll form. It was a huge library, a huge gathering of knowledge and it stood there until the Fourth Century when the Goths came and burned the whole thing down. Again, you get a sense from that that this is an educated place, this is kind of a well-informed place, a place of academia, if you would. It's a cosmopolitan City, it's a big City, it's important for trade and for travel. It's very diverse because it's on the port and on the trade route, diverse population; very important in academia and education and in technology and also, in religion. A very important City in religion. The City is full of all sorts of Temples. Temples to Greek gods; and Roman Gods; and even to Emperors, all of these great temples and even a Jewish Synagogue. In fact, on the steps of the Library here (on the picture) I don't know if you can make it out on this screen, but there is this little symbol right here. Can anyone turn their head and make out what it is? It's a Menorah. And that was basically directions to the local Synagogue and these were their road signs of the time, you just carved something in the sidewalk that said "This way to the Synagogue". Now, that's important because when we read in the Book of Acts that Paul shows up in the City of Ephesus, where does he go to? The Synagogue, yes. He starts teaching in the Synagogue and in Acts, Chapter 19 he is there and he's teaching in the Synagogue and in the streets, and he starts to get quite a big following and that's important because the most notable religious structure in the City of Ephesus is the Temple of Artemis. Now, this is all that's left of it today, not very impressive at all. There are some statues in the museum nearby that are much more impressive, very detailed and very beautiful to see but, back in the day, the Temple of Artemis was much, much, more impressive and in fact, the

Temple of Artemis in Ephesus is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This Temple was a big deal to have in the City of Ephesus and it was one of their claims to fame and one of the things they held in very high regard and were very proud of it. Which gives you an understanding of what happens in Acts, Chapter 19, because in Acts, Chapter 19, there is a guy named Demetrius. Demetrius kind of takes offence at Paul coming in and talking to people about Jesus and converting everyone. The reason Demetrius was so upset about it because Demetrius, by trade, was a silversmith and it was his job to build idols of Artemis. And so, Paul was cutting into his business and so he was getting upset about that and so he, according to what Luke writes about in Acts, he essentially gets the whole town in an uproar and starts a riot over what Paul is doing and what Paul is preaching and they can't find Paul so they take two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and they dragged them into the theatre. Now, to really appreciate what's going on, when they drag these two poor guys into the theatre and the whole town comes into the theatre, you need to understand what the theatre is like. The theatre seated 25,000 people. It is the largest theatre at that time, period. It is half the seating capacity of the Coliseum in Rome. This thing is massive. And so they drag these two guys in there and put them down at the bottom and the whole town files in and Acts says that they are screaming and they are yelling and Paul wants to walk in there and talk to everyone but the Christians say "No way Paul, you're not going in there" and they keep him out of there. The politicians come and they say "Please don't let Paul go to the theatre tonight" and eventually there is a City Clerk who manages to go in there and calm everyone down and settle the situation. But that's essentially the end of Paul's time in Ephesus. Their big rallying cry during this whole riot, what they shouted again and again, was "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" and so, that's the context in which the early Church was living and working and which Paul was teaching in.

The City of Ephesus is critical in the Bible. You may not realize how much the City of Ephesus plays a part in the New Testament. Paul was there obviously. His first time, he just kind of stopped there and went on. But, in fact, Ephesus is the place that Paul stayed the longest of any of the places he went. He stayed there for three years, at one point. The first time he came through he dropped off Pricilla and Aquila. That was their home base for a long time. That is where Pricilla and Aquila met Apollos and taught him. You may remember some of those names, if you don't know some of those names, you just kind of take the volume of this and get a sense for that. Ephesus is where Paul eventually sends Timothy and says "I need you to go work with the Church here, Timothy". Later on he sends Tychicus there. Later on, Ephesus is one of the seven churches that John writes about in the Book of Revelation and actually, after John is released from his exile on Patmos, John goes to Ephesus himself and becomes a key leader in the Church there. And so, also since John is there, the history belief is, that because John is there, that Mary, the Mother of Jesus ended up there because if you remember when Jesus is on the cross, he asks John to look after his mother, so the belief is that Mary ended up in the City of Ephesus and probably died there and is buried there somewhere. This is the house that they say she lived in (picture). I don't know if that is true but if it wasn't that house it was probably some other house in the area that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, lived in. Eventually, John the Apostle, died there and this is his grave (picture) or where they say his

grave is. They eventually build a church over top of it. And so, this is a significant place when you look at the New Testament and the writings of the New Testament and the activity of the Church in the First Century. This is an important place and it's also culturally, a place that I think is a lot more similar to us today than we might, at first, expect it to be. Because it is that idea that it is a "diverse culture". We here are a very diverse culture. It is a place of technology; it's a place of learning; it's a place of all sorts of important things that are happening.

And so, as Paul sits in prison and he is writing this letter to the Church, he is writing to a City that is politically and geographically, important. It is modern and it is advanced and it is critical to the growth and the spread of Christianity. And so, it shouldn't be a surprise to us that one of the major themes of this letter is what the Church is meant to do, and to be.

Have you ever created a masterpiece? Now I know, the term masterpiece, is probably a little bit relative, but think in your mind the closest thing to a masterpiece that you have created, in your life. I don't know, I'm sure it's not a masterpiece but it's the best thing I have to offer you this morning. Especially when our kids were younger and we seemed to have more time for some reason, when their birthdays came around we liked to make a big deal about it and we often made special birthday cakes for our kids. When Sawyer was two, we made a special birthday cake for him and, you probably think this is silly, but I was quite proud of this birthday cake. At the time, and still today, he was a big fan of cheeseburgers, so we made him a Cheeseburger Birthday Cake. We spent all sorts of time planning out how we were going to do it and that's all edible cake stuff, mostly, but I spent so much time and I was very deliberate about getting the cheese just the right colour of orange and making it look just right. I spent far, far, too much time working on the lettuce trying to do it so it was kind of that mottled green and white, sort of thing, not just pale green. I wanted to get the texture of it and put the whole thing together and it just looked really good and I didn't want anyone to cut into it, cause it destroyed all my hard work. But anyways, that was probably the closest thing to a masterpiece that I created. It was a delight to turn those raw ingredients into something. To make a product that was something special. So, What is your masterpiece? It may, or may not be, a cake. Perhaps your masterpiece is some art work. Maybe you're an artist and you enjoy painting a picture. You enjoy picking just the right colours and hues to go into your painting. Or putting in those last little detail strokes that make the painting come alive. Maybe your masterpiece comes in the world of construction. Maybe it's taking a truckload of 2 X 4's and gyproc, and screws and nails and plaster and paint and turning them into something much more than just a heap of materials. Turning them into a spectacular place or a beautiful building. Perhaps your masterpiece comes in the kitchen when you're cooking something. Knowing just what flavour go together with each other. Adding your special secret ingredient into something. Knowing just when to turn the heat up or turn the heat down producing a delicious dish for your family to share. Or maybe your masterpiece comes from somewhere else. Maybe your masterpiece is in writing; or in music; or in knitting; or in puzzles; or in repairing machinery. Whatever it is, you probably have something in your life and you probably have those moments in your life where you have created something and where all the pieces kind of

fit in, just right. Have you ever had that moment when you've finished something you've completed it and you've stood back and you've said "Vo la! It's my masterpiece. It's done. It's just the way it was meant to be. Well, if you've done that, or can imagine doing that, then you're ready to understand what Paul's first message to the Church is. Comes out of Chapter 2 in Ephesians, 10, in Chapter 2 Paul begins by reminding us where we were at before Christ and he says:

"Before Jesus came along we were a mess. We were a disaster. We were, in a word, dead, but we're not there anymore. Now you are here." Paul says, in Verse 6: "For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the Heavenly Realms because we are united with Jesus Christ."

You have gone from dead in sin, to seated with Christ in the Heavenly Realms. And notice that Paul doesn't write that that's where you will be, he says, "This is what God has done, he has taken you from where you were, dead in your sin, and he has now put you with Christ. Seated with Christ in the Heavenly Realms. That is where you are now and I don't understand exactly how that works or how that happens, all I know is that's the reality of what God says. This is where you were, and this is where I have placed you and along the way something very spectacular has happened. Along the way, this is what Paul says in Eph. 2: 10:

"We have become God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things He has planned for us from long ago."

We went from being broken and lost and falling apart self-destructive messes to a masterpiece. Paul says "We are being created anew." The pieces are being put back together; the wires are being reconnected; the paint is being touched up; the structure is being reinforced. You are a masterpiece in the making. Paul doesn't leave it there, he goes on to say in Eph. 2:19-22:

"Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple to the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His spirit."

Not only is God turning you into His masterpiece but he is giving you a place to belong. Paul says "You are no longer a foreigner but now you are a citizen. You are a member of God's house."

I don't know if you've ever been a foreigner in a different country. I have. And here's what I know about being a foreigner in a different country. When I'm a foreigner in a different country, I don't speak the language; I don't know the customs; I don't look like the people who are native to that place; I don't fit in. When I am in a foreign country it's quite obvious that I don't belong there. But Paul says, now you are no longer a foreigner with God, you are a

citizen. Some of you have had the experience of moving to Canada and you've been in Canada for awhile and eventually you get to have that special ceremony where you become a citizen of Canada. And that is a very special time. And that is a very important time to you because what that ceremony says is, now you belong here. Now you fit here. Now you are one of our Country. And that's what God says he does for us in Christ. He makes us citizens. He makes us members of His family. And everything that follows in the Letter of Ephesians is built on this point. You were a mess; you were dead in your sin but now you are a work of God. Now you have a place in God's family and when you are here, you belong. You belong because each and every other person here was just as big of a mess as you were. Because every other person here is being worked on by God. Because every other person here is here not because of anything anyone of us has done, but it is a gift from God.

You know, one of the most frustrating parts about touring ancient ruins is that most of them are still ruins. And when I walked around through Turkey last spring and saw these different cities and I walked through the streets of Ephesus, even, what I really wanted was for them to be reconstructed and rebuilt and restored. I wanted to see them put back together. I wanted these buildings to be as good as new, or better. And sometimes, I feel the same way about life. Sometimes I don't feel like a masterpiece. Sometimes I feel more like a sculpture by Michael than a sculpture by Michelangelo. Sometimes I feel more like a painting by Parker, than Picasso. I don't know if you've ever felt that way, and because of that, there are moments when I feel like I shouldn't be here. I feel like I'm a finger painting in the Louvre. Sometimes I feel like a stick-figure drawing that's hung between the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo and I feel like I don't fit here, I don't belong here. And perhaps you've felt that way a time or two. Perhaps you've even experienced that or had an experience in the Church that made you feel like you had to measure-up before you can come in. You have to get all of your ducks in a row before you can be apart. However, Paul's message to the early Church and to us is that, if you are a work in progress, you belong here. For we are ALL God's workmanship and God isn't finished with any one of us, just yet. You see, the Church is meant to be a studio, not a gallery. It's meant to be a kitchen, not a formal dining room. A construction zone, not a show room. And this is the place that God works. This is the place that God's masterpieces are being made. The place where God's house is being built. And if you're willing to let God work on you, then you belong here.

I hope you look forward to the rest of our series together. I know I do, I think Paul's got some excellent things for us to hear out of the Book of Ephesians. I have one little piece of homework for you this time around. Here's what I'd like to challenge you to do. The Book of Ephesians is six chapters long. Most of the chapters are 22 verses long, there's a couple that are just a hair longer. So here's what I'd like you to do as we go through this series. Tomorrow, start and read Eph. Chapter 1 and then Tuesday read Chapter 2, and so on, and so on, and on Saturday, read Chapter 6. Then take Sunday off and we'll come together and study. Then the next Monday, read Chapter 1 again, but read it in a different version that you did the first time and go through it that week. And then, the next Monday start again, with Chapter 1 and read it in another version. So this week maybe you start with the NIV and then next week

you can read it in the Message; and the week after that you can read it in the NAS and the week after that you can read it in the new King James. And try and find some different versions to read it in because each version will give you a little different taste a little different slant on the message that Paul is bringing to us. So, for the next several weeks, as we work our way through the Book of Ephesians, every day it won't take you very long to read those 20 verses or so. Read through one Chapter every day, read it in different versions and by the time we get to the end of our series and we get to the message out of Ephesians, Chapter 6, you guys will be able to preach it better than I do because you'll have read it so many times and you will see things that I have totally misses, which is a wonderful thing for us to share together. So again, I encourage you to do that and I hope that you are blessed by our series that we are beginning this week.