

July 18, 2021 Pent 8B
Ephesians 2:11-22
Demolition Day: Jesus Style

Have you seen any of those shows on HGTV like *Fixer Upper* or *Hometown*? They are basically the same show. One takes place in Texas and the other in Mississippi. They both involve a husband and wife who are a contractor and a decorator. They both work with couples to find an old decrepit home in a good neighborhood and turn it into something marvelous.

The shows follow the same formula. First they help a couple find an old **decrepit house**. Then they do some **demolition**. They take out walls or floors or ceilings. And at some point in almost every show the contractor will talk about how demolition is his favorite part of the job. Then they **renovate** and the show ends with a **big reveal** where they show the couple their new home and they hug and cry and can't believe it's the same house they started with. Then they're given the **keys** and move in.

I am intrigued by these shows. I get sucked into the process of watching the whole transformation and seeing the couples' reaction at the end.

And it dawns on me that we have all been through the same type of thing in our spiritual lives. And it's exactly what Paul is talking about in our epistle reading from Ephesians.

He starts with our **decrepit condition**:

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

He's talking about Gentiles (that's us). God had chosen Israel, the descendants of Abraham, as His people. We were, to use Paul's words, "separate...excluded from citizenship" in God's Kingdom. We were outside the covenant (God's promises were not for us). We were "without hope" and "without God." Decrepit condition indeed.

Then Paul moves on to **demolition day**. There are walls that need to be torn down—walls between us and God and between us and people. Paul describes it this way:

***Ephesians 2:13-15** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.*

The walls are gone. The walls between God and people? Demolished at the cross. The walls between God's chosen people Israel and everyone else? Destroyed at the cross. Entrance into God's kingdom is no longer determined by birth, but by rebirth through faith in Jesus.

We're pretty good at building walls. We build walls to protect and to shelter, to corral and to contain, to mark boundaries and to defend them. To decide who's in and who's out. Jesus tears them all down.

But remember, Jesus' goal is not merely demolition. There's **renovation** to come. Listen to verse 15 and following:

Ephesians 2:15-18 His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Jesus is working to raise a new structure, to join us together into a holy temple-- first by healing our divisions and then by creating a new structure, a new temple. This temple, though, is built to God's glory—a dwelling place for God, not built by human hands like Solomon's temple or Herod's. But built by Jesus' perfect life and innocent death.

Paul tells us that Jesus does all this through His own body. "In his flesh he ... has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." Paul is talking about the crucifixion. On the cross, Jesus accepted the full weight of our pride and our contention, allowing His own body to be broken in order to demolish everything that separated us from God and from each other.

Here again the story does not end in mere destruction. In the resurrection, Jesus not only witnesses to new life, but acts to reconcile all our divided factions to God "in one body through the cross." In a sense, this is a natural extension of Jesus' work of bodily healing throughout His earthly ministry.

Sickness or disability in that culture was a sentence of separation. Likely it meant a life of dependence or even of begging. Certainly it meant exclusion from religious life, being declared unclean for temple worship, prevented from drawing near to the physical presence of God that the temple represented. Jesus instead brings God's presence directly to those most excluded and most in need. Jesus does not let even the religious law stop him – He heals on the Sabbath, He heals in synagogues; He overturns tables in the temple and the sick come to him to be healed there.

Jesus is healing more than bodily illness. He is healing division and exclusion. In fact, He is creating a new Body, gathering together the crowds who have been like sheep without a shepherd, and bringing God's presence among them. Teaching and healing, Jesus begins to assemble a new community bound together by faith in the nearness of God.

In the cross and resurrection, Jesus consummates all this work of teaching healing. He shows himself to be present even in surrender and suffering and death. He surpasses all those ills in the resurrection, and invites all of humanity to become part of His own body. He not only restores the temple of His own body in three days, but begins to shape all of us into the Body of Christ. In the cross, the two great metaphors for the church are united and find their basis: the church as the Body of Christ, and the church as the new temple of God.

So, let's get to the final part of the show-- **the big reveal:**

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

We all are invited to join with the apostles and prophets in their self-giving role of building this new and holy temple. More, we are invited to hold each other up in service, prayer and worship, even as the stones of the temple together bear the weight of the whole.

This can only happen because of Jesus the cornerstone, who also happens to be the master architect. We may look at the church and see it terribly fragmented. We may look at our fellow Christians across the dividing line of denominations and worship styles and theologies, and despair of ever working together. Frankly, we may not want to be placed side-by-side with them in a new and unified structure.

But if we come to seek healing, in humility and in faith, then maybe we will see that Jesus, who is able to heal our divisions, is also able to grow us into one body of many different sorts of members, so long as we remember that Jesus is the head. And Jesus as our master-builder can make use even of our differences in order to create a perfect balance and a beautiful place to live.

Jesus is the key. It's time to move in.