The Reverend David Powers
Sunday, November 1, 2026

This is Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. We're in the second chapter. We're going to begin in the 17th verse.

So, Jesus came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him both of us have access to one spirit, to the Father. So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

Often in Paul's writing, he is teaching. He spent time with each of the communities to which he writes, teaching them about what it means to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ, to be ‘people of the way’ as they were known early on. He spent time with them in person, but then he continues the lesson often in his writing, and that's what we get to experience today. Paul is teaching the church in Ephesus. Specifically, his topic is that of connection. Or on this All Saints' Day, communion.

Paul knows that the life of the early Christian is difficult. He knows that being faithful is difficult. So, he wants them to know that they are not alone, that they in fact are connected, bound to each other in and through Christ. Paul knows that these folks who have taken on a new identity as people of the way, that means they have had to change the places where they show up and the ways that they show up in those places. They've had to change friendships and relationships. Their literal daily practice has changed. And he knows that when things change, especially in relationships and friendships, you can feel alienated. One might feel alienated, separated from your neighbors. And so he wants them to know that even though they are sensing disconnection from their community, even though they are sensing the diminishing of some relationships, that Jesus Christ by his power has bound them up together with folks who are near and folks who are very far off. He has connected them, Christ has.

And so that people who are following in the way in Ephesus are connected to folks all across Asia Minor who are following in the way. People they will never lay eyes upon in their physical form on Earth.

But he says that along with them and along with the people in Ephesus, “you are being built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” Paul wants the people in Ephesus to know the good news of the gospel that in Christ we are no longer separated from God or from one another. For through him, Paul says, through him both of us have access to, in the one spirit, to the Father. You're not just connected to your community of faithful Christians, you're connected

to me, Paul, you're connected to others who are trying to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ across the world.

A daily devotional this week reminded me of a favorite quote of mine. Began with this, "All sense of disconnection is simply forgetting." "All sense of disconnection is simply forgetting." It's how I started my Monday this past week. So, one of my favorite quotes because it reminds me anytime I am feeling disconnected from my neighbors, from my church family, from my family, or my friends, that is simply a forgetting that we are bound together by the spirit. There is no such thing actually as disconnection. There is only forgetting that we are connected.

Paul uses an image of a house or a household to drive this point home with the church in Ephesus. He says it's like God is building a house made of people, and he's placed Christ Jesus as the cornerstone of that household. And then he says this, "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together. Each of you, stones stacked on top of each other, you are joined together in Christ Jesus." And the construction is not over. In fact, God, by the power of the spirit, is growing you into a holy temple of the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place of God. So, collectively, y'all are stones stacked on top of each other. With Christ as the cornerstone, you are connected in a way, in ways that you could never fully grasp and understand. And as you are connected, you are being shaped into the household, the dwelling place of grace and hope and love and forgiveness and power and healing and new life. That's what it means to be a dwelling place of God.

And you are that. Stone on stone with Christ as the cornerstone. The verse 20 here made me pay particular attention this week as I was preparing the sermon. Where Paul refers to Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. Y'all may or may not know this, but in 20 days we'll mark a significant anniversary in the life of this church.

In 20 days, on November 21st we will mark 100 years since the folks that God called to Idlewild Presbyterian Church more than 100 years ago held their first worship service in this place. November 21st, 1926, the church laid the cornerstone of a building that had already been under construction and wouldn't be completed for two more years.

They had to open the windows and bring in some seats. They gathered here to hear a sermon entitled *This Stone Shall Be a Witness.* The cornerstone that was laid on that day.

The cornerstone that was laid that day was to be a witness to Jesus Christ at 1750 Union. Now, what's interesting is this for some of you, you know this already. This is our third location as a church. You draw a line southeast of here, and it'll go kind of straight through the other two locations. One at the corner of McLean and Union. The other at Barksdale and Peabody.

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Almost 100 years ago, a group of folks came to this place and they sang songs, and they prayed, and they heard a word proclaimed. And what I love about that anniversary coming up is how it connects us to the great cloud of witnesses that have called Idlewild Presbyterian Church home.

Amongst that cloud, some of you have family members.

Some of you have folks that are great, great, and great grandparents who were amongst the group 100 years ago who gathered in this place.

What I love about remembering that milestone day is it's not simply about remembering a sanctuary or even a stone, it's about remembering people that build on top of one another and become the dwelling place of God in Midtown Memphis. A place of grace, and welcome, and hope, and power, and transformation.

I preached this sermon at the 8:30 service in our chapel, and I asked them to remember what that room was before it became the Trippeer Chapel. People who have worshiped in there before, you may or may not know this, but when you leave this day, if you take a look at the chapel, it's a nice chapel now, but it wasn't that. Before that, it was a room full of Sunday school classes for little ones. And some of the more seasoned saints here at Idlewild have recollected stories of the teachers in the little cubby holes in that chapel opening the windows of their classroom and kids crawling up the berm and into their classroom instead of going through the door that's right there.

Saints, communion, a great cloud.

I thought about the power of that chapel this week when I was thinking about another chapel.

I want to tell you a story about a chapel that was really significant to me and I had no idea.

I'll try to be quick. So, my second year of seminary, it's called your middler year. In my second year of seminary, I was feeling a bit disenchanted with seminary education and the community there. If you've gone to seminary, maybe you felt that way.

If you've spent a long time in any post, you know, post-grad work, it can be tiring. I was feeling really disenchanted with the church and leadership and all that sort of stuff. So, I was not really excited when a friend of mine called me up and said, "You should come to dinner with a group of folks from a church I work at in Houston, Texas. We're only one neighborhood away in Atlanta. We're in Virginia Highlands, you're in Decatur. Come over here and have dinner with us. I think

you're going to like them." I said, "Okay." So, I showed up to this little bistro in the middle of Virginia Highlands in Atlanta, and I found a big long table filled with people who looked happy. Happier than my classmates at least. Happier than I was. Looked like they were finding joy in being in community together. I sat down beside the fellow who turns out to have been the head of staff at the church in Houston. Church is Grace Presbyterian Church. Sat down beside him and realized very quickly that everyone around that table was from the great state of South Carolina. My home state. Not only that, they were all Clemson Tiger fans. Which 15 years ago was something to be proud of, okay?

And so we connected in a lot of different ways. They knew about the place that I called home, Greenville, and about the game that I loved. We just had dinner for 90 minutes or so. It was no big deal. When I was about to leave, the head pastor stood up and gave me a hug, and he said, "Do you want to come be my intern for a year?"

And it kind of shocked me. And I said, "I don't know. I don't know if I want to come be your intern. What does that mean?" He said, "I don't know what it means. I just think I'm supposed to invite you." "Okay. Well, here's the deal. In a couple weeks I'm going to go down to New Orleans with a Presbyterian College crew, and we're going to do some Katrina relief cuz we're still…we're a couple years removed from that, but we're still working on that. How about this? I'll just keep going in my pickup truck out to Houston, and we'll check it out. And we'll spend a couple of days together and see if it works." So we did that, and I did that, and had a wonderful weekend in Houston, but I was still unsure because to do a year-long internship in seminary means to take an entire year off. If I'm being really honest, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to go back. So, we have a nice time in Houston, and I'm getting on the interstate, pulling onto the interstate there, about to make the 12-hour drive back to Atlanta, and I get a call from my associate pastor. I've shared parts of this story before, Joseph Gaston. Joseph and I did not have a close relationship. I did not know Joseph had my cell phone, so it was weird. In fact, I kind of thought something might be going on with my family that I needed to be aware of. I thought it might be a pastoral call. When I picked up, I said, "Hey, Joseph. What's going on?" He said, "I'm not quite sure. I just feel like I was supposed to call you and check in. What are you doing?" I said, "I'm getting on the interstate in Houston, driving back to Atlanta." "Why are you in Houston?" "I don't know, Joseph. This guy wants me to be his intern and take a year off of seminary and do a year-long internship at Grace Presbyterian Church." And Joseph was quiet for a second on the other end of the line, and then he said, "David, it was the best decision of my entire ministry." I said, "What was the best decision?" He said, "Taking a year off and doing a year-long internship. I did it, too." He said, "I was the only classmate of mine to take a year off and go do a year learning what it means to do church together. You should do it."

So, 3 months later, I moved to Houston because I needed to. I went out there and I got an opportunity to work in a couple different areas. One of the things that they would do is they

would allow the intern to preach, but only specifically in our chapel service. The chapel service took place in this small chapel, and it took place concurrently with a large sanctuary service. So, we had three sanctuary services, and the chapel service took place at 9:30 while the largest of the sanctuary services was happening, which means how many people show up to the chapel service? Less than you might imagine. That's why it's a great place for an intern to preach.

So, I get up there and I preach a sermon, and I was certain that it was terrible. I've gone back and found the notes from it. It was, indeed, terrible. I'm glad there are only 30 or some odd folks that got to hear it that day. Service is over. I sit down right close to this window at the front of the sanctuary, and I'm feeling some sort of way. It's this spiritual moment for me. A bit of melancholy, a bit of I don't know. I forgot to mention to y'all that my mom was born in Houston, Texas, more specifically Pasadena, which is just east, it's the eastern suburb of Houston. She had also gone to Houston when she received her cancer diagnosis and most of her treatment. She went to MD Anderson. I've talked about that before, right? So, Houston kind of brought with it all these different sorts of emotions. But sitting in that pew after everyone had cleared out of that chapel, I was feeling really lonely. Everyone else was in big church.

But I also realized that this place, this town that had held so much for me, didn't hold what I'd hoped it might. So, I'm sitting there on the front pew, and I look over and there's this window and on the window, there's a dedication. And the dedication is to Second Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas.

The music director was a kind, kind man. Not as talented on the organ as Chris, but a kind man, right? And he came down from behind the organ bench, and he came to console me. He said, "It wasn't that bad of a sermon, right?"

Thanks.

"I see that dedication there, Second Presbyterian Church. Can you tell me about that?" He said, "Well, yeah, so Grace Presbyterian Church, it was actually the joining together of two churches that left downtown Houston and made their way west. And this space, this chapel, this was actually Second Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas. They picked it up from its foundation, drove it down Westheimer, and dropped it here at the corner of Toll Road 8 and Westheimer." Westheimer's a road, sorry.

When he said this, I started to cry even harder. And he began to console me and he said, "Are you okay?" And through tears I said,"I'm absolutely okay. My mom was baptized at Second Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas. She was baptized in this building when it was 10 miles east of here downtown." And all of a sudden, through sadness and tears and a sense of disconnection and loneliness, there's this like enveloping that happens. From a physical space,

stones stacked upon each other 100 years before in downtown Houston, but also a real deep spiritual sense that I was being wrapped by the great cloud of witnesses, by the communion of saints, particularly the saint that I loved and cared for the most. Right? I tell you that story to tell you this. I don't know where you feel disconnected this morning. Not sure where you're feeling loneliness most deeply. Not sure where you're disconnected from your partners, your friends, your work, yourself even. But I want to tell you this morning that any sense of disconnection is just forgetting.

It's forgetting that you are connected inextricably to each of the folks in the pew around you, even if you don't know their name, to a great cloud that hovers somewhere over and around you of saints who have come before and saints who will come after you.

Part of what Paul was trying to communicate to the early church in Ephesus is that they are not alone. And I hope that you'll hear that as our lesson this morning, too. That we are a part, along with the saints, of a great cloud, a house, a dwelling place of God. Built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets and hagios.

I'm not sure who you're missing this morning. Who you really really wish was here with you. But I want you to know they are. They're here. Maybe not sitting beside you physically, but the promise of the good news of the gospel is that in Christ we are bound together with all the saints of every time and place.

We then can hope and experience this day with joy. Trusting and believing that we're not alone. Trusting and believing that there will come a day when the great communion of saints will all be drawn together by grace and by love. And that we will commune together in that place. It was at least part of what Paul was trying to communicate to the church in Ephesus, and it's what I really hope you carry with you from this place this day.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.