**God’s House:** Ephesians 2: 14-22 // Psalm 122

*Rev. John Allen*

“You can ask him anything you want.”

That got their attention.

I was leading a conversation about the Bible with Fourth Graders, it was a Spring rite of passage at my last church. After about a month of exploring the scriptures, the kids got all dressed up and stood in a line at the front of the Sanctuary during worship.

Then our community in an act of profound faith, placed the word of God into the hands of 10 year olds.

We handed them Bibles, shook their hands, and told them that these were their stories too. Theirs to learn. To wonder about. To question. And to share.

And then they filed off to their Sunday school class, accompanied by the Senior Pastor, leaving worship for grownups in the hands of Associates.

It was always a polished and well choreographed event. We even had a little rehearsal the Saturday before.

And I explained to them that it was our custom that after they received their bibles, they could go downstairs where there would be donuts, (that got their attention too) and they would spend the rest of church talking with the Senior Minister.

“About what?” One kid asked.

Well I said, “You can ask him anything you want.”

“In fact,” I suggested. “Why don’t we think of a few questions together right now.”

Now, any of you who have spent some time around young kids know, that they ask some really great, and really hard questions when it comes to religion.

And I really liked my colleague, but some little part of me was taking joy in the prospect of colluding with these young disciples to concoct a couple of impossible questions.

“You can ask him anything you want.”

“Can God make a rock so big that God can’t move it?” The first one was philosophical, and a stumper, so I wrote it down on the chart paper.

“How many words are in the Bible?” A bit of trivia that would at least send him grasping for his iPhone. It went on the list.

“Where does God live?”

“Another good one.” I replied, and began to write.

“No! Where does God live?”

She was asking me.

And the question was urgent.

“Where does God live?”

No doubt she had flown in an airplane before and noticed that there isn’t much to see on top of the clouds.

The first thing I said was probably the only good answer I had. I said “I wonder about that too.”

Parents, remember that one, when your kid comes home from church with an impossible question. It can be enough to join in the curiosity. “I wonder about that too…”

But it is more than a little embarrassing really to have spent so much time and energy on a theological education only to be stumped by the simplest question. And part of me felt like I had to take a crack at it. I had written long papers, gotten ordained, called by a church, I spent 7 years in school wrestling these kind of questions.

So I stammered out something. She looked puzzled. It actually almost looked like she felt a little sorry for me. And she let it go.

When we handed that girl a bible the next Sunday I felt good. There is nothing more hopeful to me than someone holding the scriptures in their hands with a thousand fantastic questions in their heart.

We put a Bible in her hands, and we told her, and the rest of them, that these stories were theirs. We told them that they were the best stories we knew. We told them that there was truth in those pages. And guidance. But also questions. And things to wonder about.

We charged them to read those stories. To share them. To ponder them in their hearts. To treasure them. Just like we always had.

And I thought about that young girls question: “Where does God live?” And I wondered if the answer she was looking for might be found in yet-untouched pages of her brand new copy of our oldest stories.

I don’t know if this was the answer she was looking for. But tucked in there somewhere are these words from the Apostle Paul, that might offer one possible answer to her question.

“You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and 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.”

To a little community of Jesus-followers in Ephesus. Paul says this:

“Build your lives together. On the foundation of the apostles and prophets. With Jesus as the cornerstone. If you do that, you will be making yourselves into a dwelling place of God.”

That was 2,000 years ago, in a coastal Mediterranean city. But it might as well be addressed to us.

This is my hope for the church. I hope that we continue to build our lives together.

I hope that we pray together. Sing together. Worship together. And learn together.

I hope we grieve together. And dream together.

I hope that we eat together. That we proclaim justice together. That we testify together.

With Christ and our tradition at the foundation, I hope that each of our lives becomes like another brick. Supported by and supporting all that is around it.

Because it we keep knitting our lives together like that. If we build ourselves together, on the foundation of those who taught our hearts to believe and our spirits to sing. If we keep visiting each other, keep praying, keep singing, keep telling our stories… If we keep holding on to one another through life’s storms. Then we are building something miraculous.

Scripture says: We are building a house for God.

“You are members of the household of God. But more than that, when you build your lives together, you create a place on Earth for God.”

That is what we are called to do. Beneath everything else. We are here to build a community where God’s love can be encountered in the fullness of its glory. Where God’s forgiveness and mercy can meet our shattered spirits. Where God’s justice can echo through a world that is broken open.

And the early church knew. That a dwelling place for God is more than a building. It is more than a budget. It is more than a committee. It is more than a mission statement.

A dwelling place for God is what we get when we take the risks to build our lives together. When we can be vulnerable enough to be held up. When we can be strong enough to hold up others. When we can be faithful enough to build on Christ’s sure foundation.

I think that you are building that kind of dwelling for God here. And I am excited to have a chance to be a part of it.

I want to sing with the Psalmist. “How glad was I, when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.”

And not just because I want to join you in this beautiful building.

Because I want to join you in this beautiful community. This house for God that you are building together out of your very lives.

Who said to you, “let us go to the house of the Lord?” For me it was my Mom. She took me every week to the Congregational Church in Needham. And I will confess to you that I was not always glad when she said unto me “let us go…” I remember more than a few times attempting to escape behind a locked door, or a good tantrum.

But now I am glad. I am glad that she said to me, let’s go. Let’s go to that house of God. And I am glad because I got to build my life into theirs. Other adults, other kids, pastors, teachers, musicians. I got to experience the love of that community.

I received their care.

I was challenged by their vision of the gospel.

They called me to ministry.

How glad I am that someone said to me, “let us go to the house of the Lord”

Who said to you, “let us go to the house of the Lord?”

Were you glad?

Very few of us end up sitting in a place like this without someone saying to us, “let’s go.” And I imagine that many of you are as glad as I am that someone invited you to build your life together with this community.

We don’t come to this on our own. God calls to us through people. God cares for us through one another. God heals the world when we take our task to heart.

God calls us together so that we can make God’s love real in the world.

To me, that task is unimaginably immense. It is humbling. And it feels impossible.

But here is what I know:

If we keep showing up. If we keep sharing what we have with one another. If we give generously of who we are, and share honestly the hardest truths of our lives. If we walk with one another through sickness and death. If we grieve with one another. Laugh with one another. Pray with one another. And sing.

Then we will keep building our lives together. Holding each other up. And being held up. Resting on a foundation that was laid before any of us were here.

And if we stick with it. If we build faithfully. And truly love each other. Then God will come to live here. You and I will realize one day that God has been in the midst of it all. That the life we have built here together, has become a dwelling place for God.

It’s hard work. For an amazing promise.

Where does God live? She asked….

“I wonder about that too.” And, I wish I had left it at that.

But if I had to say one more more thing, I would have looked at each of those beloved kids, with their big questions, and faithful hearts. I would have pointed at all of them and said:

“God lives here.”