

We Come to Church—
To Worship Christ
Ephesians 3:7-11

There was once a beautiful church in a beautiful setting. The grounds were beautifully landscaped and manicured. The time came when the church had to build a new building. They hired an architect. He designed a beautiful building and pictured it set in a beautiful landscape. Everyone fell in love with his vision for the church. The church voted to move forward. They put together a building oversight committee, arranged for a loan and hired a contractor. The contractor came in with all his equipment and immediately began digging up all that beautiful landscaping. For the next several months, the church had to endure scarred land, bare concrete slabs, and metal frameworks. The construction site was anything but beautiful. Of course, there were daily decisions to be made, which caused some conflict. There were ongoing discussions with the contractor, who often had a different vision than the architect. One night the building construction met. They were weary and worn out. Nerves were frayed. They were tired of the ugliness of the construction site and the constant battles with the contractor and among themselves. As they discussed their business, the tone of the meeting was negative. Finally, the chairman said, "Wait a minute." He got the architect's drawing of the completed building and set it on an easel. He told everyone to just stop talking for a few minutes and look at the picture. They sat there in silence and looked at the building and the landscaping. They were moved once again by its beauty. They were reminded that one day this scene would be a reality. The difficulties they were experiencing were the necessary and temporary condition to constructing that beautiful building. When they returned to their meeting, the tone had changed. The negativism had turned to a calm confidence and even joy. They just had to be reminded of the beauty of what they were building.

I think this world should have a sign on it that says, "Under construction." The world is a pretty ugly looking place right now. God created a paradise for us. We have taken that paradise and turned it into a construction site. We've torn up the ground. We've smoked up the air. We've trampled all over it. We are fighting each other over how and what to build. It's not a pretty sight.

But there is good news. God has a plan. God is working through all this stuff to complete that plan. And when it is completed it will be beautiful.

What will it look like? God has given us a picture of what it will look like. It will look like Christ.

Last week and for the next couple of weeks, we are asking the question: Why do we support the church? Why do we lift up the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness? Why do we go to church? The answer, in a word, is Christ.

Last week I talked about how we go to church to hear the words of Christ. The church has been entrusted by Christ, the Word of God, with the words of God. Christ called the disciples together and gave them his words. Over two thousand years, the church has passed those words along to each generation and to those who have never heard his words. In those words we find the truth, and we find guidance in walking the straight and narrow way that leads to life. We come to church to hear the words of Christ.

We also come to church to worship Christ.

Christ stands in stark contrast to a world in which people are more concerned about themselves than they are with others. This is a world of people at war with one another, as we are all fighting one another to get what we want and need. The best of us may share a portion of the extra with others, if we have more than we need. But many will never have more than they need. And some will never have enough, no matter how much they have.

We are a world at war. We are at war with each other. We are a world at war with creation. We are a world at war within our own souls. We are at war within our families. We are at war within our own nations and neighborhoods. Everywhere you turn, there is conflict—people hurting people.

We get tired of it. We are tired of looking at the ugliness of a construction site. There are times when we want to throw up our hands and walk away, thinking it is hopeless.

Then we come to church where Christ is lifted up for all to see. In Christ we see what will be.

What do we see in Christ? Christ was at peace with creation. He spent much of his time outdoors. He often slept in the open. He would climb mountains to be closer to his Father. He could see a farmer sowing seeds and see a lesson about how people respond to the Word of God. He could look at the birds of the air and lilies of the field and see examples of trusting God to provide for their daily needs. He could look at the clouds in the sky and see signs of the times. He was at peace with creation and creation was at peace with him. He could tell the winds to be quiet and they obeyed, because they recognized their creator. He could tell water to become wine, and it did. Jesus had a great love for creation and loved at peace with it.

Christ was compassionate. He wanted people to be happy, healthy and strong. When he saw people who were weak, sick or unhappy, his heart went out to them. He wanted to help them. And if they would allow him to do so, he would help.

And Christ could help, because he was a powerful. In fact, he was the most powerful person to ever walk the face of the earth. But he didn't take pleasure in his power. We've heard that power corrupts. And power does corrupt almost everyone. But not Jesus. He never used his power for his own benefit. In the wilderness he was tempted by Satan to use his power and authority for his own benefit, but he said no. He was sent not to be served, but to serve. He came to do his Father's will, which was to give himself in service to others. For him power was only a tool to be used for others.

Jesus didn't even use his power to help others unless they gave him permission to do so. He never used his power to overpower others. He respected people too much to do that.

To Jesus people were far more important than power, pleasure or prestige. Every person he met was of great importance to him, because they were loved by his Father. By his words and his actions he taught people that their Creator was eagerly reaching out to them with open arms.

In Christ we see a person of courage. Christ was not afraid to confront head on anything that stole the goodness of life from people. He was not afraid to confront the evil within people. He cared enough about people to tell them what changes they would have to make if they were to have the good life they were intended to have. He confronted the wealthy people who cared more about their own pleasure and comfort than they did the poor and hungry. He confronted the powerful who used their power to grind down the lives of the weak for their benefit.

In Christ we see a person who was so dedicated to each one of us that he was willing to suffer and die for your salvation and my salvation.

Christ is all that is right and good and admirable and worthy of being praised and worshipped. And so we do worship him. We lift our hearts up to him in love and gratitude.

And we are reminded that he is what this world was created to be—and will be someday. The world we live in is under construction. This isn't the way the world was meant to be. This isn't the way the world will finally be.

The day will come when we will live in peace with one another, with creation, with ourselves and with God. The day will come when it will be more important to people to help others be better, stronger and happier, than to be better, stronger and happier than others. The day will come when people will no longer live in fear of others, of the future, of nature, of their own weakness. They will trust in the goodness, power and love of God. There will come a time when people will no longer allow evil of any kind to go unchallenged. We will confront it and overcome it in the name of Christ.

We come to church to look at Christ and be reminded that in him we see what shall be.

We don't come to church to look at the church. The church is as much under construction as the rest of the world is. But the church is where Christ is lifted up. The world does not lift up Christ. The church does.

Why do we support the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness? Not because the church is worthy of it. It isn't. It is a gathering of people who are under construction. It is an institution that is under construction.

But, as Paul says, we are a clay pot containing a great treasure. Now, the words "clay pot" may not have much meaning for us. We need to update that idea. A clay pot was the Tupperware bowl of its time. Think of an old, worn-out Tupperware bowl. That's the church. Now picture that Tupperware bowl filled with expensive jewelry—pearls, gold, diamonds and other precious stones. Suddenly that Tupperware bowl becomes very valuable—not because of its worth, but because of the worth of what it contains.

When the church comes together, we ordinary and sinful people lift up for all to see the great treasure which has been entrusted to us. It is Christ. We lift him up and worship him. For a time we are rescued from the ugliness of a world in construction. And we are renewed and rededicated as we leave here and go back into that world. We are eager to get back to the construction site and complete this project so that we can enjoy the beauty of Christ in our world forever.

We come to church to worship Christ.

Dr. Wesley Welborn
Senior Pastor