

“It’s a Mystery”

Ephesians 2:18-3:12

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • May 20, 2018

As most of you know, this is a very popular time of year for weddings. And so I’m sure there were lots and lots of weddings taking place this weekend, and in fact there’s about to be one more. But I think it’s safe to say that one particular wedding has attracted more attention than any of the others. How many of you watched the royal wedding yesterday? Why? Why would you wake up very early on a Saturday morning to watch a wedding on TV between two people you’ve never met, six time zones away?

If you did watch it you’re not alone. It’s estimated that roughly 23 million Americans watched the wedding live on TV or streaming on the internet. I think one of the reasons so many people watched this wedding, as well as previous royal weddings, is that we have a curiosity, even a fascination, with the royal family. Their life is so different from ours and royalty is very rare.

But I think there’s something else, especially with this wedding. I think part of the fascination is the fairy tale story. This is like the real-life version of a Disney movie. We grow up hearing fairy tales like Cinderella where the poor outcast girl becomes the beautiful princess. It’s a story about transformation. In this case the relatively obscure minor actress from Los Angeles, the daughter of a social worker and a lighting technician becomes a real life princess, and without the help of fairy godmothers.

At this point some of you are thinking, “why is he talking about the royal wedding?” Good question. The reason is because it gives us a glimpse of the Gospel, which is about the ultimate transformation and it involves US. This is what Paul is talking about in today’s passage.

Anybody like mysteries, whether it’s books or movies or TV show? Four times in this passage Paul mentions mysteries. A mystery refers to something that is hidden that later

becomes revealed. In a murder mystery story, the mystery is “whodunit,” who committed the crime. As the story unfolds you may have an idea but by the end of the story the truth is revealed.

Here in Ephesians 3, Paul says tells us that the mysteries of God’s plan have been revealed to him and now his mission is to reveal them to others. He says that this mystery was hidden in the past. “When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” And then he tells us what the mystery is. Verse 6 says, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Today we tend to miss what a radical idea this was at the time. The Jews were God’s covenant people. God had chosen them to be His people. Now it’s true that from the beginning outsiders were able to be included but they had to become Jewish. Now, in Christ Jesus, the Gentiles, literally the other nations, are included in God’s covenant with Israel. You and I are now included in the covenant. In verse 6 Paul uses three statements to explain what this means. Our English translation loses some of the impact but in Greek Paul connects them all with the word *together*. In Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are now heirs together, members of the body together, and partakers together of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. In other words, the unclean gentiles are now equal to the Jews in God’s eyes. This includes you and me. We are now adopted into God’s family. We are grafted into God’s tree.

Today many churches are celebrating Pentecost, which we heard about from Acts chapter 2. After Jesus ascended to heaven following his resurrection, God sent the Holy Spirit on the tiny church gathered in Jerusalem.

When we hear the story of Pentecost we tend to focus on the wind or the fire or the speaking in tongues. But I think the bigger miracle, the greater working of God is the bringing together of such diverse people. We're told that God brought together Jews from Jerusalem, and Jews who were from all around the Mediterranean Sea, and proselytes (which are people who converted to become Jews). But we're told that He also brought in Romans and Egyptians and Arabs and Cretans. Cretans? How did they get included? They were low life. But God includes the Cretans. And He includes you and He even includes me. As Acts 2:39 says, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to himself."

This is the miracle of the Church. All kinds of different people gathered together to be the Church. That's the miracle, the mystery of Christ. God's plan is that the Church is the demonstration of His power. For us in the Church, then, every day is Pentecost. Today is an opportunity to demonstrate to the world the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that *through the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Not only is the church supposed to demonstrate to the world the power of Christ, but the Church is to also

demonstrate to the angels. As one author put it, when the angels look at the church on earth they should ask themselves, "how did God do it?"

So what does this mean for us today? I think there are three things we need to remember. First and most important is that everything in the church, and in fact everything in your life, must be built on the foundation of Jesus. That's why Paul refers to the mystery of Christ that is now revealed. Jesus is God in person. Colossians 1 says that Jesus is the "image of the invisible God," and that Jesus was involved in creation. In other words, Jesus is how we know God most fully.

Second, for followers of Christ the Church is not optional. We're not talking necessarily about this or any other particular congregation when we talk about the Church. I'm talking about the whole Church, which is all of Christ's followers. But being a part of the universal church means being a part of a particular expression of the church, a local congregation. Paul's word was *together*. Actively participating in a church together with others is what it means to be members of Christ's body.

The last thing we want to learn from this passage is the importance of unity among the believers. On Pentecost the Holy Spirit brought people from very different backgrounds and beliefs together to be the Church. You and I have the responsibility and the opportunity to do the same thing. I pray we will.

Amen.