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Ephesians 1:1-22  
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### Grateful Together<sup>1</sup>

There is a growing segment of Christian society that should trouble. And it sounds like this, “I can get behind Jesus, but I just can’t get behind the Church.” In other words, “I believe in Jesus but I just don’t see the importance of my regularly being part of organized Body of Christ.” While it is true that the last thing Jesus came to do was start a new religion. It is also true that the earliest followers of Jesus clearly talked about the importance of being part of the local expression of the his body.

The Apostle Paul likened the Church to a physical body where Jesus Christ is the head who guides and directs his body according to his good purposes. We, the members, are that body’s hands and feet who do the work of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Nowhere in scripture, my friends, does it support a theology that says “I’ll just cut off the head, carry it around with me, and discard the rest!” What kind of body is that? Certainly not a viable one that is for sure. In the same way, a glove doesn’t function properly without a hand in it. So the church doesn’t function in the way Jesus intended without us in it either.

Now this doesn’t mean that the Church is perfect or that we won’t make poor decisions from time to time. We are comprised of sinners who oftentimes hurt others with our words and our actions. We are just as prone as anyone else to be seduced by the gods of individualism and consumerism who lead us believe that the Church exists to meet our needs and preferences.

But we also know that the Church is the Bride of Christ, holy and without blemish. It is God’s instrument for collective worship where we gather weekly to hear the Word of God and be nourished in our faith journey by the sacraments. Where we put our collective ministry to work in the world around us and exercise our unique gifts provided by the Holy Spirit in a way that is far more powerful together than we are on our own. And where we promote a collective witness that our war with God is over, our sins have been forgiven, and Jesus is doing a new thing among us.

**WE CANNOT LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ON OUR OWN APART FROM THE CHURCH!**

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<sup>1</sup> This series is largely influenced by two books, Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2018) and Janice Kaplan, *The Gratitude Diaries: How a Year Looking on the Bright Side Can Transform Your Life* (NY: Penguin Random House Publishers, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12

What I really think is behind this sort of ecclesiology is the nature of our hearts and how gratitude can help us reframe the way that we see the church and our place within her. Something that the Apostle Paul also addressed in his letter to the Ephesians who were also struggling to stay connected to the Body of Christ.

Would you join me as we read from Paul's Letter to the Church in Ephesus 1:1-19?

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

In this opening section of his letter, Paul addressed three key issues taking place within the church that were preventing it from becoming all that God intended it to be. There was a growing apathy among their members who had lost the vision for why they were meeting together the first place. There there were some who were forgetting just how blessed they were as Children of God. And finally there were others who were allowing negativity to poison their perspectives by refusing to being open to a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit.

Let's see how Paul encouraged them to have a heart of gratitude as they addressed these issues.

Right at the start, Paul began by reframing how the people in Ephesus thought of themselves. Sinful. Blemished. Unwanted. Poor. Grumbly. Ignorant. Disconnected. Powerless. Ungrateful. When we think of ourselves in those ways, we will begin to live like that as well. And overtime, we will drift into apathy thinking what difference does it really make being part of a church anyway? And we will stop attending if we don't see much change in our lives.

Notice how Paul addresses these people, "To the saints in Ephesus."

When we put on Christ and his righteousness, that's who we become in God's eyes. "Saints!" Not the poor wretched fools we sometimes think ourselves to be. God has a much different perspective than we do.

Maybe we might think that our past defines who we are today. And if we've made some poor choices in the past, then there is no way we could see ourselves as saints now. Or maybe we know how short we fall of God's intentions today, that too could cloud our self perceptions. But my friends, hear this, God looks at the whole of our lives from an eternal perspective. Not just the people we were, the people we are, but God also looks at the people we are becoming. And hopefully, we are becoming more and more like Jesus Christ everyday.

This is what warrants the Apostle Paul calling us "Saints."

To the Hebrews it was written, "Let us draw near to [what God thinks of us] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to clean us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. [And

listen to this part]...Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”<sup>3</sup>

The next thing that Paul addresses was this failure of these Christians in Ephesus from realizing just how blessed they had become as Children of God. Paul says “We have been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” In other words, every blessing Jesus received from the Father...guess what? He has passed that down to us. So we lack nothing.

We were chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless.

We were predestined as sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ. And it was God’s good pleasure to do so.

We have been bought back from the grip of satan through Jesus’ death on the cross.

We have been washed clean and forgiven of our sins by his blood.

We have been lavished upon with all wisdom and understanding.

We have been shown the mysteries of God’s will.

We have been included in Christ, marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, which is God’s guarantee that what belongs to God will return to God one day.

This is good news! If that doesn’t get us on fire and make us more grateful, then our wood is wet! Amen!

If we don’t make it a point of regularly participating in the life of the Church. We will forget who we are and who’s we are because the world will conform us more and more into its image and less and less of Jesus.’

My friends, we are better together than we are on our own.

We are stronger together than we are on our own.

We are more blessed together than we can be on our own.

We have a greater missional impact on the world together than we can on our own.

We are more grateful together than we are on our own.

Yesterday we had a work party at Nancy Bisbee’s house in Ridgefield. Thank you for everyone who showed up to help. Along with some of the Bisbee’s friends from the Ridgefield Lion’s Club, we were able to accomplish a lot. As it is, being part of the Church connects us to a family that looks after and cares for one another. Imagine if Nancy had to do all of that on her own. Several of the Lion’s Club members came up to me and told me how touched they were by our church both yesterday and at Ken’s memorial.

Our witness to the world is stronger together than it is on our own!

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 10:22-25

Author Robert Emmons wrote, “When it comes to gratitude, ‘me’ always leads to ‘we.’ “Gratitude takes us outside ourselves, where we see ourselves as part of a larger, intricate network of sustaining relationships, relationships that are mutually reciprocal.”<sup>4</sup>

Diana Bass Butler wrote, “Although we feel grateful as individuals and can develop spiritual and ethical practices of gratitude in our personal lives, the deepest experiences of gratitude move us beyond islands of isolation into connection and community.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul reminds us that we have been called beyond our islands of isolation and into connection and community with Christ. Which is why Paul ends this section with thanksgiving and prayer. How can one not be more grateful when our words are bathed in thanksgiving and prayer? Remember gratefulness begets gratefulness while negativity breeds negativity.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, “When any... act of charity or of gratitude... is presented to our sight or imagination, we are deeply impressed with its beauty and feel a strong desire in ourselves of doing charitable and grateful acts also.”<sup>6</sup>

In the same way, notice how Paul intentionally circumvents any negative thinking by focusing solely on the positives that he’s heard about the Ephesians. “Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” And those positive actions led to other positive actions, which led to more gratitude and more praise.

“Gratitude is contagious. It can spread from heart to heart.”<sup>7</sup>

So may we see that part of being grateful is fostered through our corporate time of worship together as the Body of Christ and being reminded weekly who we are and who’s we are. We are beloved saints, joyfully adopted as sons and daughters into God’s family. May we approach the communion table with grateful hearts, knowing that Jesus has prepared a place for us at it. And whatever we do, whether in word or in deed, may we at Cascades always be a community known for its tremendous gratitude together in our hearts to God.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Emmons quoted by Diana Bass Butler in *Grateful*, 97.

<sup>5</sup> Butler Bass, *Grateful*, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Jefferson as quoted by Diana Butler Bass in *Grateful*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Butler Bass, *Grateful*, 105.

Psalm 105

God's Faithfulness to Israel

**1**

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.

**2**

Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.

**3**

Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Ephesians 1:1-19 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful[a] in Christ Jesus:

**2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** just as he chose us in Christ[b] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. **5** He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight **9** he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, **10** as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. **11** In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,[c] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, **12** so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ,

might live for the praise of his glory. **13** In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; **14** this[d] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

**15** I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love[e] toward all the saints, and for this reason **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. **17** I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, **18** so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.