

The Place Where You Can Find God

Sermon for Pentecost Monday

Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:7-14

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." ⁹(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

God can do everything and is everywhere. His fingerprints can be seen and felt everywhere – both the smallest animals and the vast universe bear witnesses to this. Yet God doesn't reveal Himself everywhere. In His great majesty and wisdom, God Himself chooses the places, people, and times where He wants to reveal Himself. God doesn't just come to us in any random way, nor does He allow our romantic or philosophical or other human thoughts restrict Him or dictate where He should and should not be. Anyone who asks the question: "Where is God?" has asked the wrong question because it's not given to us to see God or to say where He is. "I am who I am!" God said to Moses from the burning bush. This idea is difficult for modern people to digest. We want God to be who we think He is. But how God reveals Himself is different from what we think. He chooses a flawed prophet and a flawed people, and He builds a Temple among this people, and in that Temple, the Holy of Holies where the Ten Commandments are found. It had to be that way because God wanted it that way. Paul was well aware of all this when he laboriously picked up pen and papyrus and wrote a letter to the Ephesians. Like no other, Paul knew the ways of God through Moses and the Law. God is one and there is only one way to God. This is the path that this one God Himself made. One God, one way, one place. That's how it was in the Old Testament. Even if you can't imagine it, there is still an increase in this place where you can find God – and that is Jesus Himself. The place where God is to be found is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus Himself. However, this increase of the One in Jesus is not limited to one place but extends into the wider world. Jesus is no longer just for Israel, but for all nations. Jesus Christ is the one place and the one person where God and people come together. All people. This is the only way we can come to God. And so, Paul writes with such difficulty on the papyrus: He who descended into the depths of hell and then ascended to heaven again – that is this Jesus Christ. Only through Him do we come to God. Paul writes these words on his papyrus because he is thinking of the many small churches that had heard about Jesus and believed in Him. Many things were in danger of drifting apart at that time. Over and over again, people didn't want to recognize the ways of God. They wanted to make themselves great, to become famous themselves. It was too boring for them to rely only on Jesus. Instead, they preferred to become great themselves which led to different factions quickly emerging in the church. They had chosen their favorite spiritual "stars" whom they wanted to follow. And factions quickly emerged between Jews and Greeks and between those who interpreted the Law more strictly and others who no longer wanted the Law of the Old Covenant at all. What belonged together threatened to drift apart. Paul's words are ancient and yet still relevant because we too experience time and again that Satan sows discord among Christians. What happens then is similar to what happens in a family. Families are the most intimate social community there is. When there is division and discord in the family, it hits us hard and we suffer greatly because separation and discord are not part of the family and can't be endured. Sometimes, it's precisely because you're so close and know each other so well that you hurt each other. Christians are like a family. We experience the closest fellowship in Christ. Yet the differences and the things that we don't like about others are so great that we are hurt and want to separate from that person. But Paul doesn't just see the separation and the conflicts. He also recognizes many good things. Churches have been established, because of the apostles and prophets, people were taught, evangelists were sent out, teachers preached the Gospel, gifts of the Holy Spirit have adorned the Church with acts of love and truth. This could only happen as long as the Church draws from the sources that is Jesus Christ Himself. Through Him alone we are blessed with gifts from heaven. Again and again, Paul had to plead with the people and write long letters so that the churches wouldn't lose sight of this

Jesus. It's true that God made everything and His fingerprints can be seen everywhere. But it's not true that God can be found everywhere. It's also not right that we should be allowed to run after one prophet or another. And it may be true that there are many good people with good ideas, but these people do not all automatically lead us to God. No, when it comes to God, God Himself must speak. God Himself must reveal Himself to us. And God Himself chooses the ways and means by which we can find Him. The shepherds, prophets, and evangelists should not speak their own words but only the words of Jesus. And the workers in the church also have only one goal. They are to build up the church towards Jesus Christ. That's how it was when Paul wrote to the Ephesians with a weary hand. It has remained the same today. In his words, Paul repeatedly returns to the one source in Jesus Christ. He is well aware that the church would not always be uniform – there would be different languages, there would also be different customs and traditions. The experience of our everyday life is that such things divide people. If someone speaks a different language and comes from a different culture, we initially feel the separation. If someone belongs to a different political party, it disturbs friendships and togetherness. Paul certainly does not expect all Christians to be the same and to march to the same beat. He knows about the differences. There will always be these differences in the Christian community. There will always be rich and poor; educated and uneducated; and also people with different political opinions. Normally, all these things would be enough to separate people from one another. But Paul knows that precisely such differences can also be enriching for us Christians. Paul knows about the differences and focuses all his attention on the things that can hold us together: We are one body in Jesus Christ. And we have the one Holy Spirit and therefore share the one hope of resurrection and eternal life. And therefore, we belong to the one Father in heaven. Paul bases the unity of the church on God. According to him, we as a church are in the same space as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we are baptized, we are baptized into this space and from then on, we are in good company with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when we take communion, we share this fellowship with the church that is in heaven. As Christians, we find ourselves in a different reality than the reality dictated by this world. According to the concepts of this world, we humans are specific people who have had a certain education, speak a certain language, belong to a certain party and the churches of the time liked to refer to certain charismatic people. Paul emphasizes that we are all gifted. And we have all been gifted by the same person – Christ. And Christians can actually experience that the things that affect us as normal people are put into perspective in Christ.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, the church was threatened by many false teachers. The question now is what Paul actually meant by false teaching here. What did he warn the Christians of that time about and what would he warn us about today? It will only ever be this: Paul is warning his contemporaries and us alike not to put someone else or something else in the place of Christ. That is the worst false teaching. It is no different today. You hear the same thing from so many directions. We should not believe God's word and Christ didn't actually die for our sins and didn't rise from the dead. Some people find it liberating to simply set aside the words of the Bible. It is much easier to piece together your faith from any direction. Paul describes these words as being deceitful and not steadfast. Those who cling to this and every teaching will quickly realize that they are being blown back and forth from one direction to the other without having a firm foundation. Because there isn't just truth everywhere. In the Old Testament, the word holy can also be understood as "separation". God's work is therefore separate from the world and separate from man's sin. It is no different in the New Testament. For there, everything we can know about God is summarized in Jesus Christ. If we are in Him, we are holy! We are in God! If we are not in Jesus, we are in the worldly realm and separated from God. Paul did nothing other than point people to this Jesus. To this day, the task of the church has remained the same. Whether we go to baptism classes, whether we go to church services or children's services – the goal remains the same to this day. We want to go to Jesus and through Jesus to God. For it is He alone who descended into hell and from there, He ascended again to heaven, where God is. Amen.