

“One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church”  
Jeremiah 12  
Psalm 47  
Ephesians 2:11-22

February 27, 2022

Jeremiah promises that any nation who fears the LORD –  
will be added – “built up in the midst of my people.”

Our Psalm of response says the same!

That the princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.

Sing Psalm 47

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

### **Introduction: The Trinity and the Church (Eph 2)**

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,<sup>[d]</sup> but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by<sup>[e]</sup> the Spirit.*

We confess in the Nicene Creed that we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

We have been looking at the Trinitarian structure of the Creed –

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and given of life.

So it is only fitting to start our discussion of the church  
with Paul’s Trinitarian foundation in Eph 2.

Paul speaks of how Jews and Gentiles are brought together into one new man –

as Jesus Christ reconciles both Jew and Gentile to God in one body through the cross.

And through him – we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

And in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

God the Father has welcomed you into his household,  
because God the Son has brought you near by his own blood,  
and God the Spirit is the gift of uncreated grace – the presence of God himself –  
to be with us as the guarantee of the inheritance of Jesus!

Another reason for starting in Ephesians 2 is that Ephesians 2 lays the groundwork  
for Ephesians 4!

Why does Paul say in Ephesians 4 that there is *one body*?

Well, because in Ephesians 2:16

he had said that Jesus reconciles us to God *in one body through the cross.*”

Why does Paul say in Ephesians 4 that there is *one Spirit*?

Well, because in Ephesians 2:18

he had said that through Christ “we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

### **1. One Church (Ephesians 4:1-6)**

Some people have said that Paul only talks about the “local church” –  
and that he doesn’t really have a broader sense of the church.

But clearly in Ephesians, Paul is thinking about the “church” (singular)  
in a much more universal sense.

In chapter 3, verse 8, Paul then goes on to say that his ministry is 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 know to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly  
places.”*

Which church?

*The church.*

The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Jesus only has one church!

This is why Paul is so emphatic about the unity of the church in Ephesians 4:4-6.

*“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs  
to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and  
through all and in all.”*

So which church is it?!

Presbyterian? Roman Catholic? Eastern Orthodox? Landmark Baptist?

We’ll talk more about this when we get to catholic and apostolic –  
but when we talk about the unity of the church,  
we are talking about how Jesus Christ

has united a people to himself by his Spirit –  
and therefore he has united us to one another as well!

Over the last couple of weeks we were using John 14-16  
in our discussion of the Holy Spirit.

Well, in John 17:21, Jesus prays for his disciples –

and for all who come to faith through their preaching –

*“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,  
that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

The division of the church is not good.

The division of the church has only come about because of sin.

If you think about the division of Israel in the days of Jeroboam,  
you can see how the sin of Solomon –

and then especially the sin of Rehoboam,

prompted Jeroboam to rebel.

But also, it’s worth noting that God promised to bless Jeroboam,  
if Jeroboam would follow *him!*

Even though Jeroboam was leading a schismatic kingdom –  
God offered to bless him.

So church divisions are never a good thing –

and we should make regular efforts to repair the breaches in the church!

Where there has been sin, we need to repent.

The founding of the PCA was tainted by racism

(some founders of the PCA publicly objected

to having black elders or pastors sit in presbytery).

And so several years ago, the PCA General Assembly publicly repented  
of letting that slide without rebuke.

Why is it important to believe in *one church*?

Because she is our mother.

Paul says in Galatians 4 that the heavenly Jerusalem is our mother.

You are undoubtedly used to referring to the church as the bride of Christ.

But are you aware of the fact that the bible actually refers to the church as *mother*  
more often than the church as bride?!

(And if you think about it, if the church is the bride of Christ –

well, then, um, what do you suppose happens when Christ and his bride  
do that thing that married people do...?!)

John Calvin opens his discussion of the church in his Institutes, by saying:

“I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons,  
not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry

as long as they are infants and children,  
but also that they may be guided by her motherly care  
until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith...

for those to whom God is Father the church may also be Mother.” (Calvin IV.I.1).

Or as he puts it shortly thereafter,

“For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother (the Church)  
conceive us in her womb, give us birth, and nourish us at her breast” (Calvin IV.I.4).

Paul will use this maternal language to speak of his own ministry

In Galatians 4:19, he admonishes them as “my little children,  
for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

or in 1 Thessalonians 2:7,

“we were gentle among you,  
like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”

But in this way the *oneness* of the church is closely related to her *holiness*.

## 2. A Holy Church (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Paul opens 1 Corinthians in chapter 1, verse 2, by saying,

“to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus,  
called to be saints together with those who in every place  
call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”

The holiness of the church is both a gift and a calling –  
and you see that in Paul’s language:

“to those *sanctified* in Christ Jesus” –

Paul writes to the Corinthians – the most fractured, divided, and sinful church  
of any that Paul writes to! –

and he says that they are *sanctified* in Christ Jesus.

They are holy.

They are consecrated.

They are set apart to be a holy people – a holy dwelling place for God.

And yet that very consecration entails a *call* to be holy –

as Paul says, “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus,  
called to be saints...”

Called to be holy ones – called to be holy, because your God is holy –  
and he has joined you to himself!

## 3. A Catholic Church (1 Corinthians 1:2)

But then thirdly, we declare that we believe in a *catholic* church.

What do we mean by this?

In our day, many people have surrendered the term “catholic” to the Roman church,  
but there is no need for this.

Should we surrender “Pentecost” or “baptism”  
because the Pentecostals or Baptists use it in their name?

This had better be a pentecostal church, because if it is not,  
then we don’t have the Holy Spirit!

This is a baptist church—because we affirm that there is only one baptism.

But some might say, “well, the term ‘catholic’ isn’t used in Scripture, so why bother?  
Let Rome have it!”

I could as easily surrender the term “catholic” as I could surrender the term “Trinity.”  
It goes back a long way in the history of the church,  
and communicates something at the very heart of the gospel.

Indeed, the same verse that highlights the holiness of the church  
also highlights the catholicity of the church –

“to the church of God that is in Corinth,  
to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints  
*together with all those who in every place  
call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*”

The church of God in Corinth is called to be saints – called to be holy ones –  
together with all those who confess the name of Jesus.

Like us.

We have come to faith in Jesus – through the apostles’ teaching.  
So we are joined together with them as one, holy, catholic church.

The Westminster Confession provides a helpful statement of the importance of catholicity:

Chapter XXV.3 “Unto [the] catholic and visible Church, Christ hath given the ministry,  
oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the  
end of the world; and doth by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them  
effectual thereunto.”

You don’t need formal organization to be catholic.

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is not a “General Assembly”  
or Ecumenical Council calling together all the churches in the world.  
But it was a local synod – where the mother church sought to resolve a conflict.

But while you don’t need *formal* organization,  
catholicity does require fellowship.

In the first century, the apostles were the point of contact,  
and for the next 200 years, the apostolic churches remained in fellowship with each other

based on their common source in the apostles' teaching and fellowship.

So while there was regional diversity in liturgy, church order and creed,  
there was also a common pattern.

All of the creeds follow something of the Trinitarian order of the Apostles' Creed  
(which was considered a summary of the Apostles' teaching).

All of the liturgies have a common pattern, and the church orders have similar features.

Catholicity was maintained by recognizing that these sister churches preached the same faith,  
had the same worship,  
in short, shared "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

The quest for organizational unity is a particularly Roman trait.

The Bishop of Rome tried to establish himself as the center of Christian unity,  
resulting in the medieval claim  
that salvation depended on being in fellowship with Rome.

The Reformation did not reject the idea of catholicity.

They simply claimed that the Pope had overstepped his rightful place.

Both Luther and Calvin acknowledged that if the Pope would content himself  
with being the Bishop of Rome,  
then they would cheerfully acknowledge him as the first among equals.

But they insisted that each regional church  
establish its own creed, church order, and liturgy.

The Reformers desired to be like the early church  
in maintaining fellowship between regional churches,  
without requiring organizational uniformity.

So what happened?

How did we get so divided?

It was in America that this older understanding of catholicity disintegrated.

Most of the early settlers of the New World were in favor of church establishment—  
but only if *they* were the established church!

New England Congregationalists quickly established the Congregational church,  
while Episcopalians were established in the South,  
and after the Dutch Reformed Church's brief establishment in New Amsterdam,  
the Anglican Church took over New York.

But Pennsylvania and New Jersey both had large Quaker populations  
(which rejected establishments altogether)

while Maryland sought toleration for Roman Catholics,  
which under British rule meant toleration for all dissenters.

In Pennsylvania all of the old established churches of Europe met:  
the German Reformed from the Church of the Palatine,

Lutherans from the Church of Saxony,  
Presbyterians from the Church of Scotland,  
Anglicans from the Church of England,  
together with some Quakers, a few Welsh Baptists  
and a scattering of Mennonites.

The old idea of catholicity—one church per region—  
did not work when regional churches all came together in one area.

So what does catholicity mean?

When Roman Catholics accused them of being divided and divisive,  
Protestants replied that they were still united in doctrine and fellowship.

And that was largely true... but then...  
Methodist attacks on predestination,  
Baptist attacks on infant baptism,  
and then Episcopalian attacks on the validity of Presbyterian ordination...

And then Presbyterians started fighting each other...

Today we face an even more bewildering situation.

With whom should we be in fellowship?

Obviously, other PCA churches in the area—Elkhart, Valparaiso and Fort Wayne.

But Valpo and Fort Wayne are a fair ways away!

Twenty years ago we started with our closer neighbors –

Grace Reformed OPC in Walkerton and Elkhart RPCNA.

As more churches have been planted, we have connected with New City EPC,  
Christ Church Anglican, and Redemption City Church.

The joint services that we have had with Greater Mt. Calvary Missionary Church  
exemplifies this.

The one, holy, catholic church needs to be in fellowship.

You may not be able to see the catholic Church in this region very clearly.

She is divided into hundreds of splinters.

But there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

The Church of Michiana exists,

and by the grace of God she may become more visible

through the efforts of this and other congregations in her midst.

We have worked together with other churches in their ministries

(food pantries, homeless ministry, pro-life, and working with juvenile offenders).

We have connected with others in our own Michiana Covenant Academy,

Caylor House, and now, hopefully, a counseling ministry.

Why should we bother?

Why not just hunker down in our own little congregation?

Well, if we really believe a holy catholic church –

if we really believe in the communion of saints –

then we need to recognize that our communion in one another  
extends beyond the four walls of this room!

Think of how Paul so regularly speaks of the churches to one another!

Our confession summarizes this in chapter 26:

I. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory:[1] and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces,[2] and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.[3]

If we are all united to Jesus – then we are united to each other!

We are one – we are called to be one.

We are holy – we are called to be holy.

And that's why our confession says in the next section:

II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification;[4] as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.[5]

We need to be connected to the whole church!

Organizational unity (being in one denomination) is not the end-in and of itself.

Rather, being in fellowship with each other is the point.

But this means that we cannot think of ourselves

(whether this congregation, this presbytery, or this denomination)  
as a self-contained unit.

In fact, there is a drawback to organizational unity:

the resulting denomination would be too unwieldy.

Can you imagine the Church of the United States?

No, the early church was wise

not to try to establish an organizational structure for the whole Roman empire.

Regional unity is much more important than national unity.

I once proposed that the various Presbyterian and Reformed presbyteries  
in the Great Lakes area should simply merge



into the Synod of the Great Lakes.

But that would require us to get to know each other!

It also would require us to pay more attention to the fourth point of the creed:

#### **4. An Apostolic Church (Acts 2)**

What does it mean for the church to be “apostolic”?

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)*

It is not only the apostles’ teaching, but also the apostles’ fellowship that they seek.

From the beginning the church of Jesus Christ was emphatically an *apostolic* church.

Until Acts 6, the apostles were the only officers in the church.

Paul says in Ephesians 4 that apostles were the first gift to the church.

Paul spends much of 2 Corinthians defending his apostolic ministry

because he understands that if he is not an apostle,

then he has no business saying what he has been saying.

Rev. 21:14 – foundations have the names of the 12 apostles written on them

This is rooted in Ephesians 2:20 which says that the household of God

is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets

The word “apostolos” means “one sent,”

and so the word can easily be used in two senses:

1) as a reference to the twelve whom Jesus chose and sent (plus Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles)

2) as a term referring to those whom the church sends out (Barnabas in Acts 14:14; James in Galatians 1:19; Andronicas and Junia in Romans 16:7)

Revelation 2:2 helps us understand this by referring to false apostles.

If the word “apostle” was limited to the 12 (plus Paul)

then the way to tell who was a false apostle

would be by asking if he was one of the 12!

You’re not one of the 12, and you’re not Paul,

so you must be a false apostle!

But that’s not how it works.

Because in Greek, apostolos simply means “one who has been sent.”

So when someone shows up and claims to have been sent (by Jesus, or by a sister church)

the way you find out is by testing their teaching and their works.

If their doctrine is the same as the 12 apostles,

and their life comports with their doctrine,  
then they have truly been “sent” by Jesus.

But then the apostles died.

People are saying different things about what the apostolic teaching is.

Some say that Jesus was just a man.

Others say that he was an angel, or a secondary deity.

How do you know?

How do you know where the church is?

If you are visiting Ephesus in the year 100,

how would you know where to go on Sunday morning?

We know from the NT that there were false teachers leading people astray.

But false teachers don’t wear signs saying, “Beware of Wolf!”

So how do you know where to find the true church?

You look for the place where you find the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.

Or to use one word,

You find the church where you find the apostolic tradition.

(Because in the year 100 the NT does not yet exist as a single document—  
only a few people would have copies of the apostles’ letters)

Nowadays “tradition” means something in addition to the scriptures.

But in the apostles and early fathers,

tradition means “something handed down.”

The Greek word “paradosis” means literally “something handed down”

and has to do with an authoritative delivery.

So when the Fathers talk about “tradition”

they mean the “doctrine which the Lord or His apostles committed to the Church,  
irrespective of whether it was handed down orally or in documents.” (Kelly, 30)

After all, until the year 150 AD,

there were many people who had personally known the apostles.

Those who had been ordained by the apostles were generally faithful to their teaching,

and so if you want to know where to find a faithful church,

look for those bishops who were appointed by the apostles.

You could just ask your pastor – “who are you in fellowship with in Corinth?”

Indeed, the only way that the divisions and schisms that have marred the church

will ever be resolved

is if we become more and more *apostolic*.

Now, let me make sure to be clear!

This *doesn’t* mean that we need to try to do everything

exactly like they did in the first century.  
An apostolic church does not ignore 2000 years of the Holy Spirit's work in the church!  
But at the same time, an apostolic church will always *test* everything  
by the apostolic teaching.