Today is our last in our series on Ephesians, “In Christ.” I thought of the little girl in Sunday school drawing a picture, telling the teacher, I’m drawing a picture of God. Oh, honey, said the teacher, no one KNOWS what God looks like. Well, she said, we will when I’m finished.

We WILL. After absorbing the first three chapters of Ephesians, continue to see what God IS like, how DEEP the Father’s love for us is. At the end of Chapter 3, Paul prays “that we may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what IS the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

I invite us now to turn to our passage in Ephesians 4.

Lord, may the words of my mouth, centered upon Your Word, and meditation of our hearts together, be acceptable in your sight, for You are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

One of my favorite rock bands as a teenager was Three Dog Night. Do you remember them—“Jeremiah was a Bullfrog,” “The Ink is Black, the Pages White,” or “One is the Loneliest Number?” One can be a lonely number, but it has a whole different sense in Paul’s charge to the church, and it is anything but lonely. Paul writes, “There is One Body, one church and One Spirit, who blows in every place, and births conversion. One Hope and One Lord, to whom we all belong. One Faith, maybe different ways to describe it, but One surrender to Jesus Christ. One Baptism—the sign of entry into the church, One God, who is Father of us all.”

Thinking of the church, perhaps our own backgrounds in it, its history, “ONE” often doesn’t seem to be a number that describes it. Stand-up comedian Emo Philips told this story: In conversation with a person I had recently met, I asked, “Are you Protestant or Catholic?” My new acquaintance replied, “Protestant.” I said, “Me, too! What franchise?” He answered, “Baptist.” “Me, too!” I shouted. We continued to go back and forth for a while. Finally, I asked, “Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1879 or Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912?” He replied, “Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912.” I said, “Die, heretic!”

Baptists have splintered, but so have Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, Independent - dividing over issues of governance, authority, doctrine not only spatially dividing, but dividing in spirit (one feeling superior to another). “FATHER,” Jesus prayed in John 17 “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. Protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be ONE, as we are one. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be
"ONE, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

And Paul writes “For just as the body is one and has many members … and all of them, though many, are one, so it is with Christ. For in the One Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free; and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” It’s a finished work, this unity and oneness. But the manifestation of that oneness won’t perfect until the FINAL DAY. “Yet,” as someone has written, “with deep longing our Lord prayed for our unity, knowing that it rests our own blessing and the credibility of the church’s witness for Christ.” “How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity,” said the Psalmist.

I think “One” is much more than a number, it’s a PLACE and a SPACE which makes room for the Spirit and for others, often different from us.

As a young adult I had a favorite author; he was also a pastor. And as I was exploring pastoral ministry myself, with both my joys and my doubts about myself, I learned that this wonderful author did not believe women should be in leadership in the church; that was his perspective on Scripture. I wrote him (I was clearly upset) sharing my perspective. I got a letter of thank you back from his administrative assistant.

Of course, that was many years ago. I will always admire him and respect him. He and I have different understandings of this issue of women in ministry, certainly a very important one, but this difference does nothing to change the fact that he and I were both saved at the foot of the cross. And, as we all do, we both yearn to know God’s Word and we will be together forever one day. And God will have mercy on us both.

When I first read about Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church 5 years ago, I sensed this kind of place of graciousness and spaciousness, of not only having some differences, but allowing for them, welcoming them. A place of care, because If ONE part of the body is hurting all hurt with it. A place of where minds and hearts are called to Him, and called to love. “What does ONENESS look like?” It looks like LOVE.

Paul writes, “I Beg you to live a life worthy of your call in Christ with all humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” I love the words, “bearing with one another,” making allowances for each other’s faults, rough edges, weaknesses, as others do for ours! Practicing, practicing, practicing forgiveness. What does “oneness” look like? It looks like what happens when we focus on the cross.

One of the oldest churches in the former Communist East Berlin is St. Mary’s Church. For many years it was the tallest structure in the center of East Berlin, with its high steeple, BELLS ringing, drawing people into the experience of the cross, into worship of the One reigning Lord. The Communist government of East Germany, did everything to stamp out the church, to denigrate the cross, so that people would give allegiance to the atheistic State. Clearly the government did not want the highest point in the center of the city to be the steeple of a church!

Meanwhile, plans were being made to erect an enormous television tower, and it was decided to place this tower near where St. Mary’s Church stood, and the tower’s height did dwarf the steeple of the church. However, when that tower, with its big metal globe at the top, was finally finished, there was an unexpected phenomenon; when the sun shone on that globe, a brilliant cross appeared. Day in and day out, the cross could be seen when the sun was shining. People in East Berlin nicknamed it “the Pope’s Revenge.” But it, of course, wasn’t revenge. It
was just Jesus. The POWER of Jesus Christ. The CALL OUT of Jesus Christ to ALL people, the kingdom of Jesus, the unstoppable Jesus, the love of Jesus that always goes before us, wherever we are today, rises above every problem, every sorrow, every disagreement, the chaos perhaps in our own heart. The greatness of God’s work as a plan for the fullness of time to gather up all things in Him, in Jesus.

One is much more than a number; it is a PERSON. In Christ there is no east or west, in Him no south or north. The place we’re made most profoundly ONE is at this table; any differences we may have PALE in comparison with the Gift (redeeming) we ALL have received in Him, who was and is and is to come. As we eat the same bread and drink the same cup with those redeemed all over world, praying for them as they pray for us, may we TASTE that oneness and that thankfulness. Amen!

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do exceedingly more than all we could ask or imagine, to him by the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.