

“Facing What Is Within”

Valley Presbyterian Church – July 12, 2026

7th Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 46

Rev. Dr. John Wahl

Ephesians 2:1-10

Summer Worship Series

A Curriculum of Love: Deepening our Love for God, our Neighbors, and Ourselves: Week Six: Facing What Is Within

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (2:10)

This whole passage of the letter to the Ephesians builds towards its concluding verse. As the *Common English Bible* translates it, “We are God’s accomplishment” – made by God for a way of life that includes purposeful, human activity.

Last Sunday, we introduced the concept of the true, Child of God self. Despite the variety of our outer selves – the ways we look and present ourselves to one another - each and all of us have been made in and as the image of God.

And yet, there is something else inside each of us. Using the modern language of psychology, we call this part of ourselves the “Ego.” When the Ego is running the show, we can often tell; the Ego loves to criticize and judge everyone, including ourselves. The Ego isn’t evil, but it can easily be lured into thinking and doing things that are quick or easy. Our Ego is a great servant, but a horrible master.

The ancients believed that external forces – beyond what we can see – determined our actions. When conflicts arose, or illnesses emerged, or the “bad” parts of our inner selves surfaced, they placed the blame on demonic spirits; or, as the author of Ephesians says, “the ruler of the power of the air.” These outside forces led people to follow their base instincts and selfish desires, causing them to sin.

The wide diversity of outside characteristics – our sizes and shapes; things like skin, hair and eye color – are easy to see, but we also recognize that there are differing parts of our inner self: our personality quirks and preferred learning styles, our fears and phobias, the things that cause us comfort or anxiety. We often attempt to mask or suppress these inner characteristics; we may sometimes even want them to go away completely.

But guess what? God loves all parts of us. Our true, Child of God self, yes, but God also loves all those immature, selfish, impatient, judgmental, angry, and scared parts, too. God loves and understands all that we are; it is us who have trouble living with our inner selves. Part of loving ourselves is no longer exiling the parts of us that aren't "good." With curiosity and care, we can – instead – learn from them, heal them, and love them into newness.¹

The Greek verb *peripateo* – “to walk” – is a word that shows up both at the beginning and end of this passage. Used metaphorically, this “walking” pertains to the orientation of one's life and its purpose. Many people *peripateo* through their lives with a mentality that shamelessly promotes the self above all else; reducing it to the steps one takes and the choices that one makes. These personal “walks” and “journeys” toward a healthier, more fulfilled self risk misunderstanding the profound claims that the Apostle Paul is writing about here.²

Paul reminds his audience that they were once walking according to “the course of this world” where we were “dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived.” (2:1-2) Generally, people don't like being called dead, even when suggesting that they were formerly dead. And yet, death – in all of its complicated iterations – is necessary to understand the depth of the author's point: any consideration of grace requires, as a prerequisite, some reflection on death.

The New Testament has a complicated vision of death: it is, at once, an enemy and – as Christ suggests – it is how we experience new life. By dying, we live. Death is not merely a process; it is a land through which we all walk.

The question assumed by the author is whether we would prefer to remain citizens of that land or the find new life in a different realm. In responding to grace

¹ Siri Stromann, *A Curriculum of Love*.

² Kyle Fever from *WorkingPreacher.com*

by faith, Christians are rescued – saved from the land of death – and afforded the opportunity to be with Christ in perpetuity. God’s grace saves; and it is by receiving grace (which is freely given, never out of obligation) that we come to realize the perils of our deathly sojourn and our ultimate powerlessness to find a path to safety on our own.³

Readers of this passage might imagine a building contractor whose responsibility is to clear the area of dirty materials before laying a foundation. In this house being constructed by God, Paul invites all of humanity to know and apply their skills and talents in such a way that they fully function according to their God-given gifts.

We typically set up our houses according to everyday living habits and preferences that we often take for granted; and the set-up reinforces these everyday habits. We put the toothpaste in a certain drawer; we place the pots and pans we like to use in the front and the others in the back. This is more than just the “ways” or “course” of the house. It’s an environment that creates patterns of going about life’s details. Our individual actions are products of the house and its environment.

When we operated according to such a mode of life – according to transgressions and sins, Paul says to his audience – we were dead. In contrast, Paul says that we have been “made alive” in Christ; our transformation is to a genuinely new thing. We are not just to feel better about our relationship with God while still dwelling in the same house. No, this is an act of grace. In Paul’s world, grace is not so much a pardon or reprieve, but an act of benevolence that results in a better situation for the recipient. As the theme song from the 70’s TV show, *The Jefferson’s*, says: “We’re movin’ on up.” Or, rather, *we’ve been moved on up*. It’s in that transfer that we’re saved from the self-imposed disaster and ruin that inevitably results from dwelling in the old house and walking according to the old way of transgression.

People can be trapped (or, as Ephesians calls it, “dead in your sins”) and not know it. The effects of sin are not always obvious because their habits are what we know best; it is the way our house has been set up. It takes the powers of God – and the support of people around us – to break the patterns of the old life and,

³ Adam Hearlson from *WorkingPreacher.com*

instead, sustain a new one; bringing us into eternal union with Christ and reconciliation with our fellow humanity.

As the old adage goes, a person can become too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. Thankfully, the author does not leave us lost in the heavenly regions; instead, the passage's conclusion lets us see our created purpose of doing good in the world. Each and every Christ-follower has some "good works" that are their divine calling; and an appropriate response to the salvation extended to us by God.

So, what "good works" are we called to do? Among all the positive contributions that one might make, how do we choose? Saint Ignatius of Loyola, writing in the 16th century, composed a process a spiritual discernment for Christians who are seeking to find out what God intends for them. The most important rule is, "The love which moves me and makes me choose something has to descend from above, from the love of God."⁴

The church can help people know their place in the new creation and empower them to manifest their gifts and talents in the transformation of the world. Each member of the body is uniquely gifted and reminded that God has a particular role for them to play; and if one fails to function in their role, some good things may not get done.

Thus, Paul is telling the Christians of Ephesus that God does not intend for them to walk their way ruled solely by their Ego, ignoring their Child of God Self. No longer must they mask or hide those parts of themselves that seem insufficient or flawed. Instead, they have been saved by God's grace – healed, re-created, and transformed – for something much greater: sharing their gifts in good works and finding their place in God's mission of reconciling love. May it be so, also, for us.

Let us pray: *Dear Jesus, help us to see with clarity and compassion the fullness of who we are: the beautiful, the perplexing, and the parts that still need lots of healing. Help us to see all of this with God-given grace. Amen.*

⁴ As quoted by PHEME PERKINS, *New Interpreters' Bible Commentary*, vol. XI