

Finding Our Place – Sermon given July 2012
Pastor Dave Roquemore – Camp Hill

Pastor Dave Roquemore was the guest preacher for our Sunday Services at the Fairbanks Union Church on July 22, 2012. In addition to the Camp Hill Presbyterian Church, the First Presbyterian Church of Ramsey, NJ was also worshipping with us as volunteer work groups with MATE-NPHM. With permission, herewith is his message delivered so eloquently.

Finding our Place

2 Samuel 7: 1-14

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

I think a lot about place. For years, I have thought about this, partly because I am from the South, where there is a strong sense of place, and partly because I have moved so often in my life that I have lots of places, but no “place” to call home. Place is important to who we are. We come from a place, and live in a place.

I suppose some of you come to Maine from other places, and some of you have always lived here. Anyone here who has attended this church for his whole life?

Some places become important to us because of things that happen there. So it is with the Camp Hill congregation and this congregation, this place.

We have been coming here for 27 years. Over those years many different individuals have been here. When I ask what it is that brings people back, what they like, what draws them, there are several answers given.

A frequent response I hear has to do with food. Not only the good meals that our crew prepares, nor the fine picnics that people here set out for us, though all of those are good; no, the food I hear mentioned most comes from Gifford’s. God bless the Gifford family!

The most common response I get is the relationships – our people come here year after year because they have made friends here. They have made friends with others in the group, with people from other groups, and with people who live here. And we recognize one another even if we don’t know the names, right? We have built relationships with people here over the years. It was in this sanctuary a few years ago that I met Mike Carrier, then pastor from Ramsey. He was here with three youth. He didn’t have much of a clue about how they were going to work, so we incorporated them into our group that year, absorbed them, and thus began a partnership that continues year after year, and friendships that continue through the months in between.

Another reason folks say they like to come here is for the work. It feels good to work hard, especially if your usual work involves thinking in an office. It feels good to build something that will be useful and actually help someone else. It feels good to know someone’s life will be better because of the work.

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It feels good to give back to others. Some of us know how it feels to be the recipient of others' good work, of help. It is humbling, and we long for the chance to pay it back. It is good to do work that will help others.

The main reason is the call of God. In the midst of all of these other reasons, there is the sense that God wants us here, to make a friend, to make a ramp, to make a difference. In the Old Testament reading, The Lord tells Nathan the prophet that he, the Lord, has never had a house, and doesn't want David to build him one. He says, verse 10, "I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place." The one to build a dwelling for the Lord will come later, but for now, God will find a place for his people.

In Ephesians we hear that we are in that place:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

That place, where we live, where we dwell, is Jesus Christ. We are "built into" him you might say.

So then, the work of building and repairing physical houses, and the work of building and renewing friendly relationships, is really the work of constructing our part in this larger structure: the household of God. That is what we work on here, and that is why we come back year after year. When we build a ramp, we serve Jesus Christ. When we make a friend, we serve Jesus Christ. When we spend a few minutes with a lonely person, we serve Jesus Christ. That is why we are here, and that is what we are building.

These are what MATE means to us. These are the ways MATE affects our congregation. This is our mission here, but it is also your mission to us.

I don't know if you have thought of it this way, and maybe you have, but your mission for all these many years has been to offer others the chance to experience this building, to become a part of the household of God in these ways. You have hosted us and many others with the hospitality of Jesus Christ. Perhaps at times it is a hassle. Perhaps at times you wonder if you can keep it going. But always remember that what you do here is a part of the whole structure that is "joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

Your situation here, without a pastor, is new to you after decades with the same pastor. May I say a word to you about that? I was moderator of Session for a small congregation in a town that is 3 blocks long and 2 blocks wide, with one store and two churches, set amid the cornfields of Indiana. I had the privilege of working with them for two years. One night the Session was lamenting that they rarely had any children in Sunday School. They had very few children in the congregation. If they knew someone's

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grandchildren were coming, they would be ready, but otherwise no Sunday School ever happened. After some lamenting, there was a report on Vacation Bible School and what a roaring success it was! I asked how could this be, and they told me they had about a dozen children, who took all the stuff over to the county nursing home, and had Bible School there with the elderly folks. So I pointed out to them that this was a strength and told them to focus on their strengths and stop worrying about what they didn't have. As we began to do that in those Session meetings, they gained a lot of confidence.

I would say that to you. I know how discouraging a long pastoral search can be. I know you worry about funding and finances, about people and programs, about who will do what and how. All of those problems that will magically go away when a new pastor arrives! Except that they won't: those problems will still be there. And your efforts to carry on and continue the mission God has called you to do will continue even after a pastor comes. This mission we call MATE is your strength, it is your calling, it is why you are here in this time in this place. Keep it up, and do not be discouraged. You are being built "together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God," as Ephesians says, and that work continues, pastor or not.

So we are here to encourage you, and you have helped us immensely through the years, and together we have helped folks around here. We are in this together, and together we are being changed. We are no longer strangers but indeed, we are citizens with the saints in the household of God. That is who we are, that is where we live, that is our place.

Thanks be to God. Amen.