

First Mennonite Church Edmonton

“Ephesus”

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Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-4:6

Good morning, good morning, good morning, welcome all to Ephesians tours. I'm your guide Craig, it's good to have you all here. Now just to be sure, you all can hear me yes...good. Alright! Now I've heard that you're on a bit of a trip right now, visiting different early churches. I heard that you've already been to Antioch, and also Colossae. Nice, nice.

I think, you're doing something quite interesting, following the footsteps of Paul and getting to know the early churches. I bet you're beginning to notice that we're not all that different from one another. I know that there are challenges to being the church. And yes, I know that we all have our disagreements. You know, being a trading city and all, you hear all manner of different thought in a day. So yes, I know some of the challenges that the Antioch church has had, and, I know some other churches that are struggling with that, and I remember hearing things about the church in Colossae, they're struggling with similar things that we're struggling with too. But it really is reassuring to know that we're not alone in all of this.

Anyway here we are. Ephesus! Breathe in the air, <deep breath>, do you smell that salty sea air, oh I love this city, it's just filled with so much history. This is an old city, built in the 10th Century BC, so you know that it has all kinds of history within its walls. Did you know that Ephesus contains the largest collection of Roman buildings in the eastern Mediterranean. For example, if you look over there that's the temple of Artemis, or at least what's left of it. It was finished around 550BC and is considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was of particular interest to Emperor. He had a lot of building projects going on around the city. Always building, and re-building, a favourite are public baths.

Let's see, well over there is the Library of Celsus. Did you know that it was originally built in 125 AD in memory of Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus, a Greek who served as governor of Roman Asia. He paid for the construction of the library and it's said that he's buried beneath the library. The library held nearly 12 000 scrolls, and was built facing east so that the reading rooms would have the best use of the morning light.

Ah and over there is the Theatre is also a sight to see. It is believed to be the largest outdoor theatre in the ancient world with a seating capacity of approximately 24 000!

But the true wealth, well the true wealth of Ephesus, is not in its buildings or ruins, but in its harbour. It is a key harbour for the Mediterranean. It is also a harbour that needs a lot of regular maintenance. We have to be constantly dredging the harbour out. Making sure it's deep enough so that boats can get in and out to off load their goods. The problem with the harbour is that it silts up so often, that sometimes I wonder if it's going to be a noose for this city. I mean what good is a harbour city, if it doesn't have a working harbour, am I right?

Ahh but you're not here to hear about the woes of the city or to look at all the buildings, are you? No, I guess not, I mean it's good and all, it helps you get a sense of the people I suppose, and it gives you a bit of the setting I guess, but you're here to learn about the Church. A favourite subject of mine.

I suspect you already know this, but Ephesus was also a very important centre for the church. Did you know that the apostle Paul lived here in Ephesus for three years, from AD 52-54. He was one of the founding members of the church, and boy was he busy with the people. He was very involved with getting the church off the ground, and also expanding it, he used it as a centre of worship but also as a hub to organize missionary activity into the hinterlands. He didn't get along with everyone, though, he had some problems with those who weren't Christian. He often was found in disputes with local artisans, "discussions" he'd call them with people whose livelihood depended on the selling of statuettes of Artemis. Often those "discussions" would end with him in some hot water, and he'd be sent to prison to cool off. Paul even had a tower close to the harbour named after him, it's (find a location and point), yes over there, the "Paul tower"

Paul wasn't the only person who was involved with this church. The Apostle John was also involved with the church. He too stayed a while, and he did some of his writing here. The church in Ephesus was even mentioned in the Book of Revelation (which John wrote), it was one of the seven cities addressed. I guess that means that we are an important church.

And speaking of letters, after he left, Paul kept connected with the church. I remember the one day, I was sitting in the congregation when they received one such letter from Paul. It was very exciting, we loved hearing from Paul, and we knew that Paul had written to the churches in the area, and that a letter was being passed from congregation to congregation, this was one way we were sure that everyone kept in touch with each other. Anyway, we as a church, we were doing alright, we had some disagreements within, but you know what church doesn't.

But when we got this letter, wow, it really opened our eyes! As usual Paul had a lot to say, and it was all good stuff, but what stood out to me was this prayer that he stuck in the middle of the letter, this prayer and blessing, and the moment I heard it, I knew it was written for us. I'll never forget it.

"I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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

You know, that little prayer, reframed so many of the little squabbles we were having with one another, it changed the face of our church. What a great reminder for us, really.

We had done pretty well as a church when Paul was around, he kept everything going fairly well, in hindsight we probably leaned a bit too heavily on him, and so when he left, we had a bit of a challenge figuring things out for ourselves, don't hear me wrong, we got it figured out, there were just some bumps. And along the way some people had their feathers ruffled, and so we had little....disagreements.

This letter from Paul really changed our perspective. For so long, we had argued about well, our opinions, what we had thought, what we wanted, we became rather focused on ourselves and forgot about listening to God and the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, that was mostly because well we were afraid. We had a good thing going, and we didn't want to see it end.

And then here comes this letter, and it reminds us, that we need to change our perspective a little. We need to attune our ears some, that we need to listen to God and be sensitive to the holy Spirit, and remember the love of Christ. The last being the most important. The love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. Well that hit *me* between the eyes!

I often wonder, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ. Every time I begin to imagine the limit of the love of God, I realize that God's love is beyond my own imagination. And that changes everything for me. The way I interact with visitors, the way I interact with brothers and sisters, the way I interact with family. Once I realized that the love of God is beyond me and my friends, beyond my little circle of influence, beyond the church in Ephesus, that it extends beyond the limits that I can imagine, I had to change the way that I view people, for each person is a beloved Child of God, and for me to treat one poorly, means that I am treating Christ and God poorly.

Paul's letter went onto challenge us, "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." For us as a congregation it meant that we needed to set aside our petty differences to return to being united as a church of Christ, to act like a unified church. Sure we still disagreed about some little things, and we disagreed about some big things too, but we didn't let those differences separate us. We didn't let it divide us. Paul's letter continued, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, on God and LORD of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

The church here in Ephesus isn't perfect, we don't have it all figured out, and we still make mistakes, sometimes our differences get the better of us, but thankfully we have this reminder from Paul to call us back to being Christ's church. To remind us of the love of God, to remind us of our calling, to remind us of God's grace and God's forgiveness, and to remind us to try again to be Christ's church, Christ's body.

I can really get going. It's a really exciting time to be the church, so much is happening, and so much is changing, and I really wonder, what's God's church going to look like?

<Stare off and wonder>

<Return surprised>

But I was supposed to be telling you about the city of Ephesus wasn't I. Well, if you look over there, you will see the Temple of Hadrian. You'll have a little bit of time here but you can't linger or you'll be late to catch your ship, so that you can make the next stop on your tour, Philippi, so be mindful of the time...