

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 2, 2018

Text: Ephesians 4:17-5:2
Theme: “Home Improvement”

House building is quite a process. People, plans, and material have to come together to make it happen. Plans are very important for without the plans it's hard to get a handle of what materials you need and what worker skills to seek to get the job done. Then you need permits and cooperating weather. Nancy and I were involved in building a house years ago (1981). The basement was excavated and then it rained and rained and rained—a little discouraging.

Of course building a house is not cheap. Usually you don't have the financial assets on hand so you have to secure financing. The lender has to be convinced that you are a good risk. Once you have your mortgage you need to have the means to continue paying it year after year after year. Now house buying is not the same process, but still a process. You seek to find what meets your needs and maybe a lot of wants. There is still the finance issue.

Once you are in your house you want to take care of the property. This is true whether you own your dwelling or not. You want to keep it clean and in order. See there is routine maintenance on all the systems, take care of any repairs that arise. There just may be lawn work to do. And very likely the time will come for paint outside and inside. You paint for both maintenance and improvement. Paint is much better than this

(mud). Who would think mudding your house to be a good idea? But it just may happen.

Our theme is “Home Improvement,” but before improvement there really needs to be maintenance. This is an outside and an inside task. On the outside rain, wind, and hail can do quite a number and maybe do it all at once. But there are also the rays of the sun. They do a little damage every day that leads to a lot of damage overtime. Certainly that is true when it comes to exterior paint. Damage from the outside can also come by the hand of those on the outside who want to come in uninvited and treat your stuff as though it were theirs. Some sort of security must be maintained.

Wear also happens on the inside. Normal wear comes from house dwellers. Floors become worn, floors and walls marked and scuffed. There may be a few divots in the walls that just comes with the routine of living. Bulbs burn out. Filters in HVAC systems need to be replaced or cleaned. Appliances break. If you live in a rural area you may have well and septic systems to keep with as well. Houses need care.

But the house we are really interested in today is God’s House, the Church. And we are not really talking about the building. There is wear and even danger that would come from the outside. There are those opposed to the church who see it as more of a harm to society than a help. There may be a push for ordinances or laws to make it more difficult to construct a place of gathering. In some nations there are violent attacks by those who think they are serving God, but actually are

giving place to the devil a big way (vs 27). We certainly experience cultural pressure from the outside to conform the practices of the church to the immoral norms of society.

There is also wear that would come from the inside. Part of that could simply be wearing on one another as we don't always have the same way of doing things. There could be problems if the church is looked upon as some sort of game room and escape zone instead of as a kitchen and hospital. Certainly there is battling against the old nature where each individual wants to think individually in terms of me and mine instead of as "members one of another." (vs 25) Occasions for wear do arise and more than occasionally.

If no maintenance is done on a house the result is not pretty. There is chipped paint, an overgrown yard, missing shingles, a leaking roof, maybe creeping ivy that has become rather creepy. Inside there may be marked and faded paint, matted and worn carpet, ineffective and failing systems and appliances. There could be clutter and dirt. All this does not make for a very appealing or healthy environment.

Maintenance is needed. Paint can be a big part of that. But what if you decided to go with mud instead. Mud is interesting. You like dabbling in it. It's cheap, readily available, just take dirt, add water and stir things up. You like dabbling in it and find it entertaining to dab it on. So you mud your house instead of paint it. Obvious what you have is a mess.

Who would do such a thing? Maybe some sort of party animal. “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” (vs 17) It could be the “emptiness of their minds.” (**mataio, thj**, metaiotes, from **mataio, w**, “to make empty”). Resulting life from such empty headed thinking is not good. Paul speaks of being alienated from God, giving themselves up to sensuality, and greedy to practice every kind of impurity (vs 18, 19). It is a biting and devouring kind of life, empty heads spitting out rotten words. It’s not home improvement, but damage, mud, not paint.

So all this from the party animals, but you would not expect such behavior from family members would you? “But that is not what you learned from Christ.” (vs 20) No, not at all. This would be giving way to the old self with its deceitful desires, not speaking the truth in love, taking advantage of one another. This is corrupting talk, mud. The Greek word is *sapros*, that which is rotten, even putrid. You could have said something good, but instead you find fault, brush on the mud, let the tongue run wild.

The old nature is rotten and if given free reign, then rotten words spew out. Rot starts to become the norm and it’s decay leading to more decay.

But again our theme and goal is home improvement, not house rot. We remember we have been built on a solid foundation. “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saint and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”

(Ephesians 2:19, 20). In Christ the whole structure is held together and grows together into a holy temple in the Lord. (vs 21).

A home maintained has the opportunity to be improved. It's about cleaning and painting, not empty minded thinking. No, we do not learn about sensuality and greed for impurity from Christ, quite the opposite. He is the One who came down to do the will of His Father. He came to fulfill all the law and the prophets. He walked the path of righteousness perfectly. He always spoke the truth in love. Nothing by the truth came from the lips of the One who is the Truth. He came down willing to cleanse us from our rottenness. That cleansing from rottenness comes as He did give Himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God in our place (Ephesians 5:2).

In Jesus we are cleaned and painted. Paul calls us to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (4:24). We have that self in Christ. We were buried and raised with Christ in baptism. Our mud has been dealt with. Our sins were washed away. This is much more than a surface washing. It is the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus we have the sparkling paint of His righteousness.

In Christ we deal with the rot. We deal first of all with our own rot but daily contrition and prayer remembering our washing and renewal in Jesus. We look to the crucified, yet risen and reigning Jesus. Cleansed and renewed we can help one another. If a brother or sister is caught up in rottenness and we know it for a fact, we can help that brother or sister.

We do so with carefully and gently. If we ignore it it spreads in that person and to others. When rot first starts a chainsaw is not need and probably not helpful, but ignoring will only lead to worse problems. Our goal is to be able to carry out those wonderful words Paul speaks, “forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (vs 32)

Home improvement happens as we strengthen what we have. There is a lot of time spent in the kitchen feeding on the Bread of Life. We serve and encourage one another. “Let no corrupting talk (this rotten and putrid junk) come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for the building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear...let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.” (vs 29, 31).

Consider this. You are ready to speak, have something to say to a brother or sister. Ask yourself, “Is this mud or paint?” Am I speaking to better and improve or to smear a little mud? If it’s false, then it’s mud. If it’s true it could still be used as mud, stirring things up to bring someone down. We are called (8th commandment explanation) “to explain everything in the kindest way.” Instead of saying, “I really don’t like the way he swept the floor; look what he missed.” It would be better today, “Thank you for sweeping the floor. It looks better. Maybe I can help you next time.” Knocking leads to gouges, nicks, and scratches. That which builds leads to a sound structure.

When the church is a place of service to one another it is attractive to those on the outside. It is even more so we as we work together to serve

those outside. Paul tells us, “You are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” As the Gospel is shared there are more dead stones made living stones to be built into the Temple.

It’s about paint, not mud. Our sin has not been painted over but removed in Christ. We have the finish of His perfect righteousness. The paint of speaking the truth in love leads to strength and improvement, not rot and decay. For Jesus’ sake. Amen