

# I Do Not Cease

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church - Brunswick, ME

Sunday, May 10, 2015

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

---

## Introduction to the Scripture

Around 90 CE, someone sat down and began to write the Letter to the Ephesians. That person delicately took stylus or quill or whatever it was, and began to write:

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

A couple thousand years later, scholars have pretty good hunches that two thirds of this isn't technically true. (They wouldn't argue that the author sent grace and peace.) Now, if you think I'm setting this up for you this way because I don't think we should listen to this letter... hang in there with me, because quite the opposite is true.

This is the ancient version of when, in school, they taught us about letters... my favorite part was the fill-in-the blank part. Who is the letter *from*, whom is it *to*, what's the address? I'm not sure why, I think I just liked any bit of school-work that I didn't have to think about. Also? That you could fill in what you wanted to. Geoff Parker, Gnome, Alaska sounds nice. It could be aspirational. Also, I'm one of those people who still is a little mystified that the whole postal service hasn't collapsed under the weight of people putting the address they want as the return address and dropping letters in the mail with insufficient postage. I'm pretty sure this is just because everyone is better people than I am. Or has stopped writing letters because the postal service is collapsing under the weight of people doing other things.

What is most important about who this letter is *from* is that the author wanted to honor or follow in the tradition of the Apostle Paul. What is most important about the *to* is that the earliest known texts of this letter make no mentions of the Ephesians. This letter is a truly new form of our faith. It was a message in a bottle, so to speak, meant to find and encourage Christians wherever it might wash ashore. It used the name of its famous would-be author to connect, but what we have here, is a text that truly means to be global...

So after its introductions, it invites Paul to say a prayer for us, the church listening in on a new word for us... praying for gifts that we might see...

## Sermon

A letter written to the whole church, and inside of it is a prayer. I don't know why, but it really struck me this week that our New Testament is collection of writings from the road. The nature of writing was deeply pragmatic in these days... And the sudden explosion of Roman roads made this not the time of the community scroll, something to hold one community's ancient self, no, this is the time of the letter. Suddenly words could be delivered far away. Words could travel in some ways they couldn't have done not so long ago. To have something written down almost certainly meant you were trying to talk to someone who wasn't there and probably wouldn't be any where near you for some time.

I'm fascinated by letters. I'm a history nerd. I revel at the joy of those documentaries where all people do is read letters to each other. One of my favorite all-time blogs is [Letters of Note](#)

- There is a letter that was prepared in case the moon landing didn't go off.
- There are the letters that Abraham Lincoln wrote to Ulysses Grant. (Perhaps marking the last time a president was able to get away with writing "You were right and I was wrong.")
- Letters from celebrities to fans. (Iggy Pop to a teenage girl being one of my favorites... "Grow up big and strong," indeed.)
- There are, of course, love letters, of various appropriateness and intensity

Maybe because it is so threateningly permanent, letters draw out a different kind of language and reflection when we write them. In a letter, sometimes, we find ourselves talking to a projected version of ourselves, working out the details of a story or a feeling with the recipient. In a letter, sometimes, we find ourselves writing to the other as we truly see them, and maybe see them more than they see themselves. In our distance when writing a letter, there is a paradoxical kind of closeness.

A letter always seemed to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. -  
*Emily Dickinson*

This prayer text is used this coming Thursday, celebrated in churches in many Christian traditions as the feast of the Ascension... which is a weird kind of holiday to celebrate. It's essentially the risen Jesus saying, "this Easter thing has been real, but you folks are going to have to work on this church business without me glaring over your shoulder." Between Ascension and Pentecost, when things suddenly got a lot more energized, the disciples had to spend a lot of time wondering what they should do. In the end, they will have to see themselves differently, not as followers, but leaders of a church.

When you think about it, all of what we have come to call Christianity is the slow unveiling of a love letter that Christ left to friends. People who needed that letter more than anything else. Peter with all his thoughts of his own betrayal. Thomas with all his wonder but his doubts. Mary Magdalene with all her past and future. Christ's Easter has been to say that what has past cannot bury us. Christ's ascension is that we can still rise. We are seen, as God sees us.

This kind of seeing is at the core of parenting, mothers and fathers all... the gift of seeing the core heart of a child, and possibilities contained within them. And naming it for them. Maybe even using a little of that aspirational fill-in-the-blank time from letter writing time...

The prayer we hear today in this letter asks for that kind of seeing for the gathered church. It names the love they have for God and for each other. The words the writer asks for: a spirit of wisdom and revelation are not just any words for seeing. Wisdom here is *sophia*, the ground of all knowing.

Revelation is *apokalypsis*, uncovering, see the true form. For us, it reminds of the word apocalypse... so , seeing as we will see in the end, a vision of the reign of God.

That's the challenge to the church in this prayer of Ephesians: a challenge to see the revelation that God has given us in the church, Christ's body, yes... but let's remember what that really means. It means that each of us, and certainly in our congregational life together *all of us* are a place for God to be revealed... if we can see.

Maybe that feels a little close to home for me these days, a short time from being away. I haven't said it here yet, so thank you for the ways you honor our ministry, but particularly these days ahead for the way in which you're allowing me to renew and recharge in the months ahead on sabbatical. So maybe today is the start of a letter I mean to write you (if only in my head) over the next few months.

We are the church: "the fullness of the one who fills all in all."

But we need gifts of wisdom and revelation to see it so. In each other, with "the eyes of our hearts enlightened" we can see the hope we have found. We need gifts.

To see in a paper cup of punch the Spirit's invitation. To see in a hand-written letter, a hope for healing, or maybe for hope itself. To see in a hymn, a chance for everyone to have their own voice caught up in God's music.

Just so you know, then... I see you. You are a vision.

I see you having Adult Education conversations about human sexuality and recognizing that those conversations are deeply holy, and yet touch on so many of our experiences of being denied our very selves. I see you making space for your questions about bodies, about love, about families, and about the meaning of our incarnated lives.

I see you in Jane's Team, doing ministry in a community, meeting neighbors in need at the doorstep, recognizing that the most least you can do is help with a meal for today, but maybe the most you can do is listen and be present and see.

I see leadership doing hard work in discerning how to move forward with our facilities and our buildings. Because accessible is not always the same thing as welcoming, but not accesible is sure as can be a sign of a closed door. In recognizing that sometimes a comfortable place to sit is an invitation to rest in God, and the chance to see the singer is to hear music anew.

I see us all, hungry for where the Spirit is calling us. This is a church that is about rising, this ascension day.

I see you seeing each other. Keep doing that while I'm away, will you?

I do not cease, no matter where ever I may be, to give thanks for you. All of you and each of you. Part of and the fullness of the church, Christ's body, a vision, a source of revelation. I do not cease, I hope you remember, as I write to you fondly

All my best to you, saints of the church,  
*The Rev. Geoff Parker, Esq,*  
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary*

*writing to you this day from  
Gnome, Alaska.*