

“REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE”
(Ephesians 2:12-14, 19-21)
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[PROPS NEEDED: ECUMC Logo Video]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-9-11]

-I-

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Ephesians 2:12-14, 19-21 and Pray.
2. [WATCH ECUMC LOGO VIDEO (Time 0:15)]

A–For the last three months or so, hopefully you’ve been noticing our new church logo

1–It’s now in our bulletins, newsletters, website, and other places.

2–Today you’ve received a bag with it, and as you go to your car you’ll hopefully find yet another surprise containing it.

B–But the purpose of a logo (or symbol) is not just to have a cheap gimmick or a cool picture to look at, or even to tie together communication pieces (although it *does* do that).

C–No. The purpose of a logo is to remind us *of* (and point *us* to) an idea beyond itself.

1–When we see an American flag, for example, we’re not supposed to only see a rectangle with alternating red and white stripes, and white stars in a blue field.

2–No. It’s supposed to remind us *of* and point us *to* the ideas and concepts that *make up* America: ...our history; our people; freedom; liberty; justice; democracy.

3–When we see a cross, hopefully most of us don’t just think about two lines crossing each other at perpendicular angles, but a whole host of beliefs and stories that comprise the Christian faith – the cross, you see, points beyond itself.

D–Well, our logo as a church, is meant to convey something similar. It’s meant to remind us of our fundamental reason for being (our “mission/purpose” as a church) – in short, it’s to remind us of **WHO WE ARE** and *to what* we are called as God’s people.

3. Today, I want to take some time for us to revisit and remember that identity and calling.

-II-

4. Now, obviously we begin as “United Methodist Christians” (represented by the cross and flame in the logo), living out our faith in eastern Cobb County. But what’s unique about that? How are *we* any different from any other United Methodist Church around us?

A—Well, several years ago, we conducted a church-wide survey to help understand this, and the responses we got back amazed us, because they were all over the board!

1—Some people felt very strongly about the importance of contemporary styles of worship, ministry and communication, while others felt equally strong about the importance of more traditional styles and ways of doing things.

2—And, of course, the responses from our Kenyan congregation reflected yet another set of unique needs and forms of ministry.

3—It was also clear that some respondents had grown up in this community and had lived here their whole lives doing things certain ways, while others were new to the East Cobb area, and were *not* as tied to “the way we’ve always done things.”

4—Some people had a very distinctive *conservative* approach to politics, economics, and theology, while others were clearly more *liberal/progressive*.

5—And the responses we received represented different ethnicities, nationalities, and socio-economic backgrounds.

B—And I could go on and on describing the differences in the responses, but the point that quickly became clear to our leaders is that it would be very difficult to articulate a “one-size-fits-all” description of who we were because the responses were so diverse.

5. But the more we thought and prayed about it, the more clearly the answer came: our variety differences, and diversity actually *reflect* who God wants us to be because they reflect the very nature of God Himself, and of God’s family.

A—Today’s scripture is a great example [**Contemp. Service ONLY**: Let me read it... Read MSG version of Ephesians 2:12-14, 19-21]...

1—Here is the story of diverse people (in this case, Jews and Gentiles), separated by different beliefs, practices of worship, and even by different rituals of daily living.

2—Yet, in Christ they came *together* no longer as “*strangers/aliens/outside*rs”, but as fellow members of God’s family.

B—You see, I think this scripture is telling us that instead of lamenting *our* differences as a bad thing, we as God’s people simply need to *celebrate* and *claim* them!

1—...That rather than all trying to be alike or think alike or worship alike, we can learn to give each other space and grace to be uniquely *different* – to honor and respect the differentness among us as a reflection of the very diversity of God Himself.

2–And that’s why the first part of our mission/purpose as a church says that we are “**A Mosaic of God’s Family...**” – because in a mosaic, each piece is different and unique from the others, but they all fit together to make a beautiful portrait.

3–And so our logo reflects this, as well: each of *us* is a unique and beautifully *different* stone on the path of faith that leads us all to the cross of Jesus Christ.

6. And yet, our “reason for existence” as a church involves *more* than just *being* and *becoming* a Mosaic of God’s family – there are also things that we’re to DO as that mosaic.
7. Here at East Cobb UMC, we call these the “*three G’s*” of our mission/purpose, and they’re reflected in three key action phrases...

–II–

- 8 First, we’re to be “**GATHERING to embrace God and all people**” – in other words, to share in worship (“embracing God”) and Christian fellowship (“embracing all people”).

A–In today’s scripture, Verse 13 talks about groups that were “*far off*” being “*brought near*” – in other words... *gathered together* into one “house” or family.

B–Well, that’s what God does – gathers us together, *despite* our many differences (like the stones in the logo) so we can develop meaningful relationships with Himself and others.

C–So, whether its through our HeartLight Contemporary worship, Traditional worship, Kenyan worship, or through Sunday Morning Café or Wednesday Night Fellowship Supper, our church “*loves God and loves our neighbor*” through the ways that we worship and fellowship together.

9. But we’re also to be about “**GROWING in Faith, Love and Joy**” – in other words, to practice what we call Christian Discipleship, Stewardship, and Spiritual Growth.

A–Verses 20-21 of today’s scripture uses the metaphor of being “*built*” into a “*holy temple*” as a way to describe the necessity of God’s people growing and maturing in faith (just as our logo path *grows* as it reaches out from the cross).

B–And his point is that just as important as worship and fellowship are, if you and I don’t take time to participate in things like a Sunday School, Bible Studies, Men’s or Women’s ministries, and other small groups, if we’re not generous stewards of our time and talents and (yes) our money, then according to Paul, we’ll never really “grow up” in our faith and discover the joy of Christ.

10. And yet, true Christian faith is *never* meant to be kept to ourselves, but to *give away to others*. That’s why we’re also called to be “**GOING into the world to serve and share Jesus**” – in other words, to engage in ministries that we call “missions” and “evangelism.”

A–The teachings of Jesus and Paul make it clear that going into the world to *share* the gospel as we *serve* others is one of the primary tasks of all Christians (Read Matt 28:19-20), which is why the path in our logo extends *outward from* the cross *into* the world.

B–So, here at East Cobb UMC, things like our annual “Great Day of Service,” our various mission trips, community events like Trunk-or-Treat and our Christmas Musical, and even our “Lighthouse Academy” are all examples of ways that we as a church try to “give away” our faith by verbally *sharing* and tangibly *demonstrating* God’s love for others.

–IV–

11. Now, when we do these “*Three Gs*” right, notice that they form an interactive circle:

A–E.G., We GATHER at the foot of the cross for worship & fellowship of the living God,...
 1–...So we can GROW in our understanding and love for God and each other, ...
 2–...Giving us tools we need to GO into the world as a diverse Mosaic (the logo path)
 3–...Making disciples for Jesus, so that *they too* can “*Gather, Grow, and Go!*”

B–This is the nature and character of biblical Christianity, and it’s what each of us is called to share in every time two or more of us gather together.

C–It’s our identity – it’s WHO WE ARE! Let’s remember and practice it as God’s church!

12. [PRAYER]

13. [HOLY COMMUNION]