The words have an otherworldly ring to them, and if we do not stop to think about them, we may assume they are about eternal life. But the death and life to which Paul refers is right here and right now. We might call this a “conversion experience,” as the movement implied in “raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him” is an internal, spiritual movement from an earthbound perspective to a heaven-inspired one. The reason we can be sure that Paul did not write of a life-after-death experience here is because he concluded this passage by saying, “For we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand *to be our way of life*” (2:10, emphasis added).

Still, being “seated” with Jesus in “heavenly places” does not sound much like the usual experience of daily life. Paul is using praise-filled language to convey the idea of looking at our lives from above and being motivated in our daily actions from God’s perspective.

Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th-century priest who founded the Jesuits, developed a process of spiritual discernment for Christians who want to learn what God intends for them. An important principle of that process is this: “The love which moves me and makes me choose something [must] descend from above, from the love of God.” This principle speaks of seeking God’s will and being moved to act by God’s love.

The writer of First John speaks of this kind of motivation using different words: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them…We love because [God] first loved us” (1 John 4:16, 19). The love of God for us moves us to show that same kind of love to others.

The idea of moving serves as a useful metaphor for us. We may not always instinctively choose our daily activities and responses to others based on what we think God wants of us. To make that move, we must make a conscious effort, to imagine ourselves in another person’s situation, to consider how he or she is feeling, and to anticipate how we might meet their need. Some days, the effort required to do this is akin to moving our entire household to a new place.

Commenting on this text, William Barclay tells a story about moving. There was a woman in Edinburgh, Scotland who lived in a dingy, cellar apartment. She attended the church where George Matheson pastored. Matheson lost his sight while a seminary student, but he continued in ministry and became renowned as a powerful preacher. The practice in Matheson’s church was for elders to take communion to members’ homes at various times throughout the year. The elder assigned to take the elements to this woman discovered her cellar apartment empty. When he finally tracked her down, the woman was living in an attic that was as light and airy as the cellar had been dark and dingy. He commented on the difference: “I see you changed your house.” She responded “I have. You can’t hear George Matheson preach and live in a cellar.” The grace of God elevated her view of life, like being seated in the heavenly places. Her change of heart, her new heavenly-inspired perspective, led her to act and change her living conditions.

Now, you might assume that this kind of living would get easier the more we practice seeking and doing God’s will. But sadly, that is not necessarily the case. I have moved or relocated several times in my life, and each time the task becomes more difficult. Each move takes more effort because I have more “stuff”. The first move, to and from college, was easily accomplished with my first car: a Plymouth Reliant station wagon, a good “starter car” that could go from zero to sixty in about 3.5 minutes on a downward incline with a stiff tailwind! Everything I needed fit (creatively, if not easily) into one car. When Karen and I married, we moved the stuff from two apartments into one with the help of friends and their cars. As children came along, so did more stuff, and now, with eighteen years’ accumulation of things, more effort will be required if/when we decide to move again. And let’s not forget that moving entails mortgages, underwriters, realtors, move-out deadlines, and a moving truck. It is easier just to stay put, isn’t it?!

Some days, trying to see life from God’s perspective seems just as overwhelming as moving to a new house. It may just be easier to stay where we are. Trying to look at life from a heaven-inspired perspective, moving our viewpoint and then acting accordingly, does not get easier, even as we make it our regular practice. We drag more and more of life behind us as we move along: the joys and pleasures; the sorrows and disappointments; the doubts and worries; and the voice of God, which initially seemed to speak to us so plainly, sometimes falls inexplicably silent. But God’s silence does not necessarily mean we somehow failed; it just means that God wants us to walk by faith.

One of the odd things about moving this past year is that if you moved in hope of lessening your exposure to Covid-19, the move may have been an exercise in futility. The word pandemic, of course, refers to how widespread the risk of exposure is. You cannot completely run from a pandemic. Likewise, even as a religious conversion or a commitment to follow Jesus moves us, as the words of our text say, to be “raised…up with [Christ] and seated… with him,” such relocation does not ensure that we will always succeed or have a clear word or direction from God.

Nonetheless, the love and grace of God already received through Christ compels us to goodness, with a desire to do God’s will. The move that Paul describes as being seated with Christ in heavenly places helps us to better please God and do the good works that God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. May we be willing to live that way.

Prayer: O Lord, my God, I praise your holy name. I pray for your will to be done in my life and in this world, for your way to rule here on earth as it does in heaven. I am not in control, Lord, you are, even though that is often hard for me to admit and accept. I release what comes next into your hands, O God, trusting you fully. I want to step into whatever path you lay before me, even when it looks different from what I thought I wanted. For I know you have bigger plans for my life, and I submit my life to your will. I will trust and obey you with an eager and joyful heart. God, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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**Moving to Jesus**

Sunday, March 14, 2021 Ephesians 2:1-10

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In July 2020, the Pew Research Center released the findings of a study entitled: “About a Fifth of U.S. Adults Moved Due to Covid-19 or Know Someone Who Did.” Assuming the study is accurate, that means 65.6 million people moved last year (based on U.S. census of 328 million people). When you drill down into the study’s statistics, however, it turns out that young adults, a mobile demographic at any time, did much of the moving, and possibly moved more than once. Think of a college student moving into their dorm in January, then back home in March, and back to school in August or September.

The pandemic caused many such unanticipated moves. Some people moved due to employment changes, like the restaurant worker who moved because his job went away when eateries shut down. And some people moved simply to escape areas with high infection risks. This last type of move is called: “panic-moving”. Whatever the precipitating reason, migration dramatically increased among adults who decided that last summer was the right time to change locations.

According to demographers, people move for life-stage reasons, because of things happening internally in their lives, so some of the relocating probably had little or nothing to do with the virus. Case in point: one of the writers for *Homiletics* magazine and his wife moved for family and retirement reasons. In the process, they learned that they were part of the migration boom. Their real estate agent spoke of a housing shortage because of so many people moving or wanting to move. The couple listed their home in late June and the very next day received an offer that was $3,000 *above* their asking price. They accepted the offer and then phoned several moving companies before finding one available to truck their household stuff to their new location. Movers spoke of the difficulties in booking a truck because of the higher number of people relocating.

The major theme of our reading from Ephesians is the grace of God; but included in the text are a couple of statements about moving: “...even when we were dead through our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ.” (2:5). “[God] raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6).