

"Jesus Our Peace Maker"

Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

Ephesians 2:11-22 (Series B. 8th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 89:20-37

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Let Us Pray:

There is an ancient Jewish story about two brothers who lived on farms right beside one another. The older brother was in his mid-30's and had a wife and two boys. The younger brother was in his early-20's and wasn't married and had no family. The two brothers loved each other. They enjoyed living next to one another.

They helped each other with projects. Well, as the story goes, one day the older brother looked over to his younger brother's farm and thought (to himself), *"Hey, you know, he only has himself. If something happens to my brother, then who's going to take care of him?"*

I have my wife and our boys are strong and growing. I'll be fine." So, the older brother decided that he'd go over to his grain bin at night and load up a sack of grain and take it over to his little brother's grain bin and return under the cover of darkness and go to bed.

Meanwhile, one night, the younger brother looked over to his older brother's farm and thought (to himself), *"Hey, you know, all I have to take care of is me. If something happens to me, it's fine. It's just one person. But my brother over there, he has a wife and children. If something happens to him, then how will he support his family."* So, the younger brother decided he'd go out early in the morning, and go over to his grain bin and load up a sack of grain and take it over to his older brother's grain bin.

Well, the two boys did this for weeks on end and never bumped into one another. Then, one night, the older brother got out a little later and the younger brother got up a little earlier, and they each went to their own grain bins and filled up a sack of grain and started off to the other's farm.

And of course, this night, under the bright reflection of a full moon, the two brothers bump into one another and finally realize what had been going on all along. And they drop their bags of grain and embrace. <1>

Now, according to this Jewish legend, God looked down from heaven and in that moment, He said, *“This spot of their embrace will be the spot where I build My temple – for My presence is most clearly made known when brothers dwell together in unity.”*

Everybody loves a unity story. Everybody loves a story of people coming together for the common good. Whether it’s in the movies or real life. Whether it’s a group of individual players on a sports team winning a championship, or whether it’s a community banding together in times of natural disaster. We love these things because we were made for community.

Unfortunately, the gap between the ideal and the real is deep and wide and painful. Sometimes teams don’t come together. Sometimes families fail. Sometimes friendships falter. Sometimes churches split.

Not always, but enough so that when we read stories of community we recognize that we’re looking at an ideal that we haven’t quite yet reached. We recognize that each of us has enough relational and social pain in a fallen world that we need to come together.

And that brings us to Ephesians chapter 2 – a chapter that seeks to clearly remind each and every one of us that it is only in Jesus that we can overcome the divisions that keep us apart. What we have before us this morning is a passage of scripture that beautifully describes Jesus’ ability to take people who are hostile and divided and bring them together into one family.

It’s the ultimate picture of bi-partisan reconciliation. It’s the supreme image of racial, social, and economic justice. And you and I know this is something we desperately need in our world today.

Verses 1-10 are a description of the power of Christ to redeem us and save us individually and they are, then verses 11-22 reveal how Jesus brings about unity

among diversity in this new body called the church – a group where all prior distinctions of race, gender, religion, and social status are done away with.



And now, more than ever, those of us that call ourselves Christians, those of us that call ourselves Jesus-followers, those of us that call ourselves believers in Christ need to be reminded that there's a world outside these walls and they're yearning for a unity story, they're longing to see and know that it's possible to be a family under one roof, to be a community of people united in purpose and passion.

This morning, I want to highlight three things about the universal body of Christ: we all have the *same problem*, we all have the *same solution*, and we all have the *same invitation*.

The Same Problem: Sin

Verses 11-12 describe the state of the Church before Jesus Christ. We don't typically talk or even think in these terms, nevertheless that's us: *alienated*, *strangers*, having *no hope* and *without God*. To be fair, in the context of Paul's letter, he is speaking about Gentile Christians in verse 12 where he uses all of those terms.

In verse 11 Paul highlights a very obvious point of contention (circumcision). According to the Jewish tradition circumcision was *the* sign that you were part of God's chosen people. You say, "*How is circumcision a sin? How is simply being obedient to God's command a sin?*" Well, the act of circumcision itself isn't a sin, but allowing it to lead you to a point of arrogance is.

And Paul cuts right to the chase and highlights the fact that the Jews and the Gentiles had the highest contempt for one another. In fact, the hatred that the Jews had for the Gentiles was so deep that the Jews said God only created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell.

They referred to Gentiles as dogs, and some Jewish women even refused to help Gentile mothers in the middle of childbirth, because to do so would be to help bring another Gentile into the world. Talk about racial superiority.

But highlighting circumcision also clearly revealed a sore spot for Gentiles. They were separated from Christ. They were on the outside looking in. They had no hope. They were hopeless. That's what verse 12 says, "...*having no hope and without God in the world.*"



That phrase "without God" is the Greek word *atheos*. Where we get our English word for "atheist." That's what people are that don't know Jesus. At one point in time you and I were atheists. Maybe not confrontational anti-believers, but we had no hope. We were without God in the world.

Jews were eternal optimists – they had hope for a glorious future, they never doubted that the Messiah would come. But the Gentiles had no such hope. For the Jew, history was always going somewhere. For the Gentile it was a dead end. For the Jew there was at least the joy of worship in the Temple, but even that was off limits to the Gentile.

The outer most court surrounding the Temple was the Court of the Gentiles. There was a partition, a little wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Women and at designated intervals along that wall were signs written in Greek and Latin that prohibited foreigners to come any closer.

In fact, in 1871 one of those signs was discovered and the inscription reads: "*Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy Place. Whosoever will be taken doing so, will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue.*"

It was clear. If you were a Gentile you could only get so close to God. So, Paul reminds the Ephesian church – both Jews and Gentiles – that they have the same problem: sin.

The Same Solution: Jesus Christ

"*But God...*" Well, just like that, Paul is reminding the church that they had the same problem and then he writes, "*But now...*" and the story changes. The emphasis shifts. The spotlight is redirected. The page is turned. And verses 13-18

are one big long reminder of the power of Christ to *save and redeem, to change and transform, to cleanse and make new.*

Just listen to the language that Paul uses:

- Vs. 13, *“you who once were far off have been brought near,”*
- Vs 14, *“[Jesus] has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility,”*

◀4▶

- Vs 15, *“[Jesus] might create in Himself one new man in place of the two”*
- Vs. 16, *“reconcile us both to God,”* and...

Vs.17, *“[Jesus] preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”*

Verse after verse, sentence after sentence, image after image, Paul is reminding the church that we have no ground to stand on if we want to boast. The late Billy Graham so often said, *“The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”* There should be no division when it comes to our salvation.

In Romans 16 :17 Paul writes, *“I appeal to you, sisters and brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them”*. So, we should not misunderstand what Paul is saying to us his morning. Paul isn't saying that anything goes in the church and we should never have disagreement and that we should always stand in a circle holding hands singing *Kum ba yah, my Lord kum ba ya.*

No, he's saying that when it comes to the fundamental point of our salvation the solution for our sin problems is not limited to the color of our skin, or the language we speak, or the education level we attain, or the amount of money in our bank account, or our age, or even our gender. All of these categories are external. They're human-centered, human made.

The unity we have as a Church is not in the fact that Jesus makes all Jews into Gentiles or all Gentiles into Jews. The solution Jesus offers doesn't turn all men into women, or all women into men. It doesn't force white people to become black people, or black people to become white people.

The late William Barclay writes, *“The unity which Jesus achieves is not achieved by blotting out all racial characteristics; it’s achieved by making all men of all nations into Christians... It produces people who are friends with each other because they are friends with God; it produces people who are one because they meet in the presence of God by way of the cross.”*

◀5▶

All of us have the same problem: sin. All of us have the same solution: Jesus Christ. And all of us have the same invitation and be cleansed.

The Same Invitation: Family

In verses 19-22 there are two images that come out in the language: *family* and *home*. Listen to the words: *“no longer strangers and aliens”* but *“fellow citizens with the saints and member of the household of God.”* And then, *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself the cornerstone,”* the *“whole structure... a holy temple... built together... into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

Did you hear it? Fellow citizens. Saints. Members of the household of God. Foundation. Cornerstone. Holy temple. Dwelling place for God. And I may add We are cousins!

We don’t come together each Sunday on the basis of some general commonality. We don’t come together because we’re of the same generation, or we like the same kind of music, or we have the same taste in fashion. We don’t come together because we use the same language, or because we’re from the same part of town.

No, no, as much as some of those things do bring us together, none of them are the essential and real reason for Christian community. The most fundamental reason for Christian community is that we have the same problem (sin), we share the same solution (Jesus Christ), and He calls us to the same invitation (family).

I’ve shared this from the pulpit before, but one of the things that I cherish most about you, St. Ansgar is that we are a community church and any one who walks

through these doors are welcome. And many of you share a similar sentiment. In fact, that's precisely why some of you have joined this faith family, and it's one of the reasons that others of you continue to visit.

Do we fully reflect the diversity that is found within global Christianity or that we wait until in heaven? No, but we do a fairly decent job of bringing people with varied backgrounds and experiences together under the authority of God's Word to worship, praise and exalt our Saviour Jesus Christ.

◀6▶

There's a Latin phrase that goes like this *Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*, which means "*where Christ is, there is the Church.*" When other people ask us where we go to church, or what we find most attractive or appealing about our church, I hope that one of the things that comes to mind is that we have the *same problem*, we have *the same solution*, and we share *the same invitation*.

I do believe, and hope do so, that God's presence is most clearly made known when different kinds of people come together in Christ Jesus. The world is still watching. Let's show them what Jesus Christ can do. Jesus is our Peace maker. Amen.

July 21, 2024

