

"He Is Our Peace"

July 18, 2021

Ephesians 2: 11-22

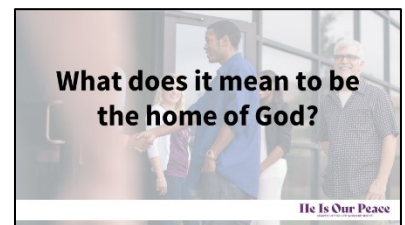
¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — ¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Last Sunday we began our new "Geared Up for Life" worship series with "Setting Our Hope". Paul reminded us that when we know that we are blessed, when we are chosen, when we claim our place in the family of God, then we can set our hope on Christ. We were reminded that as children of God we are forgiven, redeemed, and restored from our sins. Because of this we can set our hope on Christ. When we live with our hope set on Christ, we can live bringing joy to despair, we can live for relationship instead of unto self, and we can be participants instead of spectators, bringing God the glory. This morning we reflect on what setting our hope on Christ leads to: he is our peace.



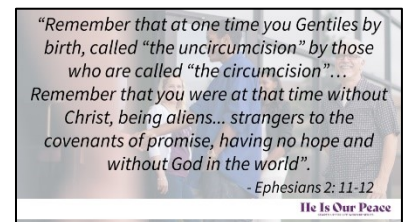
At the core of today's passage is the idea that the church is the dwelling place of God. God chooses to take up residence amongst us, bringing us his peace. We begin this time together with a question: What does it mean to be the home of God? As a community of faith, we can be the dwelling place of God when we strive to break down the walls that divide and when we are willing to include, invite, and make welcome those that others exclude or have no room for. This is how we extend the peace of Christ to others. Last Sunday we focused on putting our hope in Christ and heard the call to live that hope out in the world, sharing our hope with others. What does it mean to put our hope in Christ, to be the home of God? It means being a place or person of peace and belonging for all people, no matter what. As we begin, let us pray...



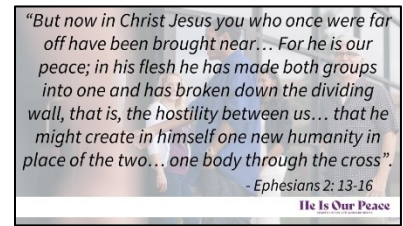


When we claim that Christ is our peace it does not just mean that we get along with each other. That is certainly part of it. But it also means that we reach out and seek to be in community, in relationship, with those outside our walls. In doing so we will better recognize our call as followers of Christ to stand with those who suffer abuse and neglect and violence, to stand against racism and injustice and prejudice, and to break down walls that divide and separate us. Because Jesus is our peace, we are called to be peacemakers. Under that charge we are called to walk where Jesus walked, out and among the people. Jesus' walk was not easy. Ours is not either.

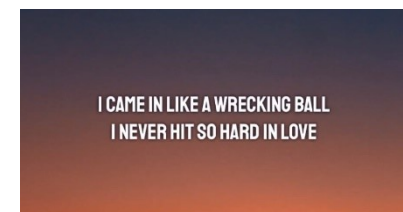
Turn with me to Ephesians 2, beginning in verse eleven. As we begin with our text for today, we quickly see that division is not something new in our world. Paul begins by reminding the churches in and around Ephesus that they were once on the outside looking in. In verses eleven and twelve we read these words: *"Remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'... remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens... strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world".* Talk about putting up some walls or barriers! Called names, without Christ and without hope, aliens and strangers to the promises of God. What a terrible place to be, right? But can you remember when you were there – on the outside of the family of God, not knowing the hope and peace we find in Jesus?




As we continue into verses thirteen through sixteen, we hear about how all of this was broken down in and through Jesus Christ. Here we read, *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near... For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two... one body through the cross"*. Jesus sought to unite Jew and Gentile, to make one body, unified through the cross that draws all things to the Father. I believe that this remains God's intent for humanity and for the church – to be united, to be one. But it is hard. We love the idea of Jesus being our peace, of Jesus comforting us when we're hurting.



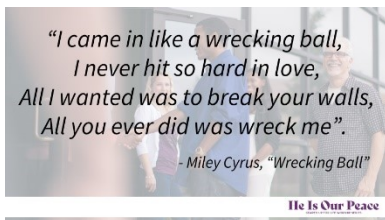
We long to hear Jesus tell us all is well and to have him clean up our messes when we stumble and fall and are human. And yes, my friends, Jesus is all of these things and more. But if we appreciate these benefits that we receive from Jesus and if we are glad that we were brought near, as we read about here in this passage today, and if we take the idea of bringing others near to Christ seriously, then we must learn to walk where Jesus walked. And that is not easy. The chorus of this pop culture song summarizes quite well what Paul is getting at in his letter to the Ephesians. The words will be on the screen. *[Play video.]*





There is division and separation in this passage and in our world and in our communities there is division and separation. There is “us” and there is “them”. There are citizens and members, there are aliens and strangers.

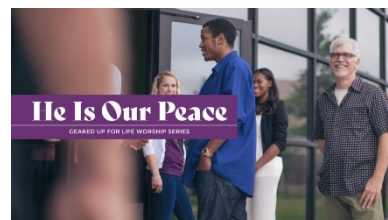
Where does the peace of Christ fit in this scenario? On a personal note, we appreciate the peace of Christ that passes all understanding when we are grieving or hurting. We crave his strength in the trials and storms of life. We hold dear to eternity and the idea that one day all things will be made new. But when Paul writes that Jesus is our peace, he is thinking about far more than our personal Jesus. Paul has something bigger, something louder, something more transformational in mind.



"I came in like a wrecking ball, I never hit so hard in love, All I wanted was to break your walls, All you ever did was wreck me". The wrecking ball Jesus came in like

a storm, knocking down walls – destroying walls of division and hostility and injustice. He came in love, hitting so hard that all the measures that we use that say we are better than or superior to or more important than others were shattered and broken. Jesus wants unity and community and fellowship – not just in the body of believers but in all the world. All he wanted to do was to draw all things unto himself – the source of love and peace and hope and mercy and grace and forgiveness and life. Jesus sought to break down any and all walls that lift Jew over Gentile, rich over poor, man over woman, this party over that party, that neighborhood over that community, and so on. All he wanted to do was break our walls.

In verse fifteen it speaks of Jesus abolishing the Law and its ordinances because the Law was something that separated people, one from all others. The Law provided a high ground for the Jews to stand upon, a high moral ground from which to look down upon everyone else. Jesus paid a high price to unite two peoples, to break down those ancient walls that had divided one group from another. It required his blood, it required death. In love Jesus poured out his all – and he was wrecked in the process. Jesus was willing to pay that price because it opened the way for a new kingdom to be built, to be established, to be developed. Early on the church lived it out. They gave all and shared everything they had. No one was in need. Everyone had a place at the table. They cared for the aliens and the strangers and the sick and the orphaned and the widows. One and all were welcomed into their fellowship. Love and the peace of Christ guided their lives. We carry over parts of this. Today we celebrate a fragment of what the earliest church was all about as we gather at the communion table that welcomes one and all, friend and stranger, saint and sinner. The global United Methodist Church claims the slogan, “Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds”. Anyone is welcome to come and worship with us or to fellowship with us, right? If he is our peace, then ‘yes’ is the answer to these questions.



But the reality is that we are pretty good at building walls. And we are also pretty good at hiding behind those walls. We too easily allow those walls to define us, to protect us, to insulate us. Even though Jesus came to *"proclaim peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near"*, we do not live in peace with all peoples. We do not actively seek those who are far off so

that we can bring them near. Even though *"through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father"*, we do not always really act and behave as if all people are worthy of inclusion in God's family.

During our Lenten series this year, "Eat" was one of the five practices. This habit of highly missional people encouraged us to eat with three other people each week, at least one of which was not from our church. Perhaps you, like me, left a table like this and looked down upon the empty plates and cups and were thankful for the time spent in community, in fellowship, in the development of relationships. After a meal together, I could think back to a time before we were friends, to a time when we were strangers. But time around the table changed that.

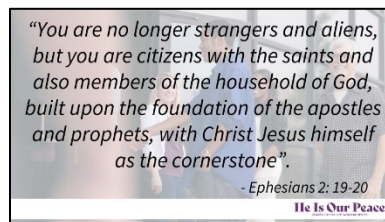


The table was where we were all the same. Using Michael Frost's words, the table can be the "great equalizer". Once there, I believe that can be very true. As long as we are willing to first allow the other inside our circle. As long as we are willing to cede space for the other to be heard and understood. As long as we are willing to open our hearts to stand for just a few moments in the other's shoes. As long as we are willing to be vulnerable and to enter into a place of mutual respect as we seek to love as Jesus loved. That's a lot of "as long as" statements. Those are a lot of walls. Such is the way of the world.

There are, of course, other ways that we enter into fellowship and community. It happens here at church on a Sunday after worship when we spend an hour together socializing and connecting.

Folks gather around those tables and share life. New people are invited to come and sit, to share a bit of their stories. It happens in our neighborhoods as we engage one another. For me, for example, becoming friends with Dennis began when he came over to see what Ron was doing as he worked on the riding mower that lived at the parsonage. Since then Dennis has supervised several projects and has even lent a hand on one or two projects. Now, when I haven't seen him for a week or so, I feel a need to linger a little longer outside when I'm doing something in the yard, gaining an opportunity to check in with each other.

Returning to our Ephesians passage, we see why Jesus is our peace. He is what binds us together into one body, into one family. In verse nineteen we hear this truth: *"You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone"*. We are all one in Christ, built upon Jesus as the cornerstone, the foundation, the one who is true and solid. Jesus' peace is not a 'play nice with those just like us' kind of peace. It is not an 'engage only like-minded, upright, Christians' kind of peace. He doesn't seek to just bind those who are the same together. Jesus desires to make us all equal, all worthy, all deserving of the same time and treatment. This is and always has been revolutionary talk. In Jesus' day to level the playing field was to take power from the Romans. It was a risky proposition. To tell the religious leaders that all were welcome in God's family was equally daring and dangerous – it wrested power from their hands.



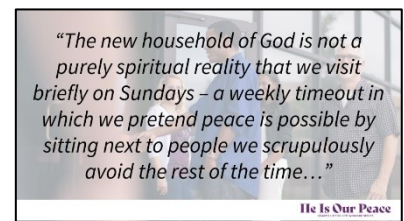
I do not believe it is much different today. To make space at the table for others will inherently make some in power feel less important. To speak on behalf of one who is experiencing abuse or oppression, or injustice will inherently take power from the abuser, oppressor, or unjust person.



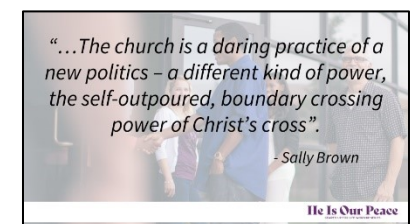
No, Jesus' peace is a wrecking ball peace. It is a peace based upon the idea that we are all worthy of being in the family of God, upon the truth that at our core we are all creations of God's mighty hand, upon the

understanding that the ways of Jesus are not the ways of the world. Jesus wants to knock down the walls, the invisible barriers, the superiority, and the judgment – all that separates and divides. This revolutionary love will transform not only society but our church as well. Author Sally Brown offers this take on what church should not and should be:

"The new household of God is not a purely spiritual reality that we visit briefly on Sundays – a weekly timeout in which we pretend peace is possible by sitting next to people we scrupulously avoid the rest of the time..."



...The church is a daring practice of a new politics – a different kind of power, the self-outpoured, boundary crossing power of Christ's cross".



This speaks of a church and community not forged in the worldly halls of power but in the blood and bone of the crucified Christ. These words speak of a church that practices revolutionary love. This is a vision of a church that brings together all people and holds them all together in love. It is a vision for a church that lives as Jesus lived and loves as Jesus loved.



Being unified as one, living and loving as Jesus did, is precisely what Paul was writing about in verses 21 and 22. Hear these words once again these words of love

and unity: *"In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God"*. Formed around the words and example of Christ, we are joined together and we grow in the faith, both individually and as a church community. Becoming a dwelling place for God, we are able to be filled with his peace.

When we allow Jesus to be our peace, we find a willingness and an ability to join together in fellowship and at the table with people we once thought so different. Doing so, we live as Jesus lived, we love as Jesus loved. We become like a wrecking ball to the walls that the world wants to build as we strike hard in love. Yes, we may get wrecked in the process, but in the end, we will know even more of Jesus' peace as we bring his peace to a world in need. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you ponder growing the community around you, what first steps do you need to take to get to know your neighbors and coworkers?
- 2) *Pray*. Considering the call to tear down walls that divide, what prayers do you need to lift to live and love more like Jesus?
- 3) *Study*. Read Ephesians 3: 7-13. When have your sufferings, like Paul's, been for God's glory? How has this developed your faith?