

Ephesians 2:13-22      9th Sunday after Pentecost      July 20, 1997

*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— 12remember 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. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

*14For 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. 15He 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, 16and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

All men are created equal. So says the Declaration of Independence.

But some are more equal than others. So I first heard from a theology professor.

One is endowed with height and strength and health, another is born to sickness, weakness, body misshapen.

Women are naturally less muscular, more vulnerable, yet live longer.

One is born to live in a mansion, another to suffer hunger from the moment of her birth.

One is showered with love, another holds up his arms against a rain of blows from a father, a brother.

A few can compose complex musical works at a very young age; others will struggle for a lifetime with simple math.

So what does God do in such a world? God chose a people - one nation, Israel - a people to bless.

God delivered them from slavery, God gave them God's law, with them God made a covenant promising to bless them.

No wonder sometimes they seemed to think they were better than everyone else. The almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, chose them above all other peoples.

When a mother chooses to favor one daughter and not the other what happens? Daughter hates daughter. Remember the story of Joseph and his brothers, how their father

avored Joseph, giving him a special coat. The brothers wanted to kill him, ended up selling him to slave traders instead.

Hostility.

In a family.

Between peoples.

God chose one, and the result was hostility.

Hostility between Jew and Gentile

The hostility did not begin with Hitler. Already before Jesus time foreign rulers were intent on crushing the Jews. They were different.

Already before Jesus' time the Jews looked down on the Gentiles - despised them.

Much of the New Testament tells the story of Jesus by saying his cross - his blood - brings forgiveness of sins. That is the way we all learned it.

But the letter to the Ephesians tells to Jesus death in another way. Listen:

*Remember, you Gentiles by birth were at one 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.*

Having no hope and without God in the world - that is the way it was for all who were not part of the people of Israel.

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

People who were strangers to God are brought near to God in Jesus Christ.

Our lesson continues: *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.*

In Jesus Christ the hostility between Jew and Gentile is overcome. And not only that hostility: Paul writes that there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female in Christ; all are one in Christ.

All the differences that divide us, differences wrapped around us in our birth - differences made clear as one achieves power and wealth and fame, another shame and poverty and weakness - in Christ every difference is overcome. Even the differences in our goodness, overcome as the commandments are abolished in Jesus. Listen:

*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 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.*

This lesson is written in complicated sentences. But simply put Jesus death on the cross overcomes everything that would divide us so that we might be at peace in him. One new humanity, not Caucasian or black, not Hispanic or non-Hispanic, not first world or third world, not male or female, but one in Christ. Only Christ matters, all the rest is part of a world that is passing away. Whoever you are, whatever you have done, when we believe in Christ we are one in him.

Listen: *So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

There is no other way to peace but in Christ. O, always someone dreams that if we can just teach all the children to be accepting of differences there will be peace. But then they become intolerant of those who are not accepting.

Another dreams of economic equality as the way to peace, but no sooner has the pie been divided than one is lazy and another ambitious and one is getting ahead again.

But in Jesus Christ we are one, for in him we are each of us loved with a love that went to death for us, and promised to be raised to a life that is beyond our grasp. Grace we call it - a gift - given to all of you who have faith in Jesus Christ.

When the end has come and all of God's children are gathered in Christ, God promises that nothing else will be remembered but what Christ has done. Our joy will be in him, our boasting in him. our life from him.

Already you are invited to live the life that is to be. You are welcomed to live as one who has only Christ. You are privileged to look at every neighbor and see only Christ.

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all are one in Christ Jesus.*

Thanks be to God.