

July 18, 2021
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 2:11-22

JESUS IS YOUR PEACE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 2nd chapter, which you had read earlier.

I'm sure that you're not surprised when I say that we live in a time of division. We are divided over politics, religion, and a host of other topics. This past year, our division has become more evident: pro-mask or anti-mask, pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine, Republican or Democrat, Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, every life matters... except for the unborn. We're even divided over the countless alleged genders and alphabet soup of sexual preferences... even though God's Word is clear. Division drives people apart: husbands from wives and wives from husbands, brothers, sisters, parents, and children, even dividing brothers and sisters *in Christ* within a congregation.

In our epistle reading St Paul writes of division between Jew and Gentile. And while both the context and division in our text are different from the division you face in your context, Paul teaches us that for all who are *in Christ*, the dividing walls of hostility are broken down. There is peace and reconciliation for all *in the body of Jesus*.

To be sure, there has always been division. People have always been separated. The Lord God made a covenant with Abraham that He would make him a great nation. Through His offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed. (cf: Genesis 12:2-3) The sign of the covenant was circumcision. All males, eight days old would be circumcised, a visible sign in the flesh, a wall of division if you will, of the everlasting covenant with God. All who refused the sign would be cut off from God's covenant people and from the promise of a Savior, first given to Eve in the Garden of Eden. (cf: Genesis 3:15, 17:1-14.)

God set the Israelites apart as His own people to live holy before Him. His moral and ceremonial Law said: "*Thou shalt do this and not do that. Thou shalt not eat this and thou shalt not touch that. And most especially don't associate with those who are uncircumcised. There's one Law for the House of Israel and another for everyone else.*" (Exodus 12:43-49; Deuteronomy 7:2-5)

The separation demanded by the Law was symbolized inside the Tabernacle and later, in the Temple, with a thick curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Holy Place. The Holy of Holies is the place where the Lord God dwelt among His people. Only on the Day

of Atonement, once a year, the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then, only after he had been purified. This created more division among the people. (cf: Leviticus 16:1–19) The curtain separated our most Holy God from all things unholy. This separation was also symbolized by the wall built around the temple during its reconstruction following the Babylonian captivity. The stone wall had signs at its opening warning Gentiles not to enter lest they suffer the pain of death. (cf: Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, Winger, 121–122)

The time of division remained until after Jesus was born... for a while at least. Like all Jewish boys, He too, was circumcised on the eighth day. (cf: Luke 2:21) When He sent out the Twelve, He commanded that they:

“Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 10:5–6)

But for Jesus, Himself, He can to seek and save the lost, from every tribe and language and people and nation. (cf: Revelation 5:9) He didn’t come to abolish the Law or the Prophets – but to fulfill them. (cf: Matthew 5:17) You might say Jesus came to preach to both sides of the aisle: Jew and Gentile alike, those of the circumcision and those of uncircumcision. He came to knock down the wall of division so all mankind would be united into one flock. (cf: John 10:16) And He did. He told the people:

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”
(John 12:32)

God in the flesh of man brought an end to the division between the Israelite and the Gentile, the circumcised and uncircumcised and every other sort of division you can invent or think of. When Jesus cried out and breathed His last on Calvary’s cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. (cf: Matthew 27:50) The wall of the Old Testament Law that had stood for some 1,400 years was destroyed. Jesus has made peace, reconciling the world to His Father, reconciling all who are ***in Christ*** to one another.

Last week I talked a lot about what it means to be ***in Christ*** and Paul continues that theme today in our text. You are ***in Christ***... that is, the fact that you were united to Christ in Baptism and adopted by God into the family of His Holy Christian Church, you have been granted His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. (cf: Romans 6:2-11) All who were baptized into Christ’s death are reborn, made new, and restored to the image of God (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:9). Regardless of whether you’re Democrat or Republican, red, yellow, black, or white, Jesus gave His life for all.

“... by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

It doesn’t matter from which tribe and language and people and nation you come from.

“¹² For there is no distinction... for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” (Romans 10:12)

Jesus has completed His work of salvation on the cross and God has bestowed upon you all that Christ has won on your behalf. St Paul writes:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-14)

For all who are ***in Christ***, you have been brought near, near to God and near to one another by Jesus’ shed blood. Christ Himself is your peace and makes peace between God and you... the peace of reconciliation with the Father... and peace between all who are in Christ, accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection.

You were once far off but have been brought near and given God’s riches at the expense of Jesus’s holy precious blood of Christ. He is your peace and because you have that, you now have peace with God and peace with one another all because of what Christ has done. But with all the division in the world and in your life, you’re probably wondering: *“Pastor, I don’t feel at peace. Why are we still divided? Not that Jews, Muslims, and Christian are divided – but that Christians are divided among themselves. How can you talk about peace and reconciliation?”*

Christians are divided because of our own sinfulness. Each of us wants to be in charge and be our own God with our own belief system. You want to cut out the parts of the Bible you disagree with and pencil in those things that you believe God got wrong. It’s exactly why there are so many different denominations in the world today. It seems that every time a denomination decides to get ecumenical and join with another denomination, the two do not become one – but the two become three due to someone not agreeing with the other two.

Unity cannot be achieved by everyone running in a different direction – but only by drawing closer to God and His Word, testing the Scriptures against Scripture so that we confess the same Scriptural truth. (cf: 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21; 1 John 4:1) God’s Word is the only rule and norm according to which all teachings should be evaluated and judged. (cf: FC Ep I, 1) Jesus’ Word is truth and apart from Him, you and I are separated us from God and from one another. But ***in Christ***, we have been reconciled to God. And if reconciled to God, what can divide us from one another? (cf: Ephesians, Concordia Commentary, Winger, 349)

The answer to our division is the same as it was last week. It’s all ***in Christ***. Your union with Christ and your union with your fellow believers is – not in yourselves – but it’s all ***in Christ***. When it’s left up to you and me and our sinful flesh, we’re creating division and building walls. So, repent of your division and building walls and receive the blood bought forgiveness of Jesus for your sin. Allow the Holy Spirit to create a clean heart within you so that you turn from your sin. In Baptism you died to sin. How can we who died to sin still live in it? (cf: Romans 6:1–2)

“... in Christ, [you are] a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

[In Christ]: ***“... It is no longer [you] who live, but Christ who lives in [you].”***
(Galatians 2:20)

It’s not your work – but a work of God. In our text it’s not that ***in Christ*** the Gentiles have immigrated and assimilated into the nation of Israel. No. Paul says that Christ died:

“... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ... [He died so that He] might reconcile us... to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:15–16)

It’s not that the Gentiles ***alone*** needed reconciliation – but Jew and Gentile and you and me were all in need of reconciliation.

“... [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him [you] both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:17-20)

If you are going to build a wall, build on the foundation of Christ and Him crucified.

“⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,” (Ephesians 4:4–5)

You were once you were far off, but now ***in Christ*** Jesus you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. In Baptism God clothed you with the righteousness of Christ, making you part of the Body of Christ, His holy temple where He dwells wherever two or three are gathered in His Name, bestowing upon you, forgiveness, life, and salvation in Word and Sacrament.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.