

Ephesians 2:13-22

July 25, 2021; Pentecost 9, 2021

Walls are meant to separate. Walls are meant to divide. We have walls in our homes to separate one room from another. That way we can have a room that is meant to be used as rooms to prepare food, a room to relax, a room to sleep in. Walls may be built on a scale that is much larger than our homes. Walls are sometimes used to separate one country from another. Walls can be built to keep someone out and to protect people from being attacked. Walls can be built to keep someone in so that they can be safe. Walls can be built to keep dangerous people from getting out into the world. Walls are meant to divide.

But we don't need a physical wall to divide us. It is not a shocking statement to say that we live in a divided world. Just look around us. We are divided nation. People are divided over politicians, over wearing masks or not, how a pandemic was handled or not handled. There are racial tensions all around us. There are protests that are peaceful or not so peaceful. I'm not here this morning to debate many of these important topics. Yet, I do think that we can say that we live in a divided world. Even though we might have divisions in some of these areas, there is nothing new about divisions in this world. If you look at history, divisions have always existed.

The congregation in Ephesus was made up of two kinds of people. There were Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. They were not getting along. The Jews prided themselves on their "*chosen*" status. God had promised that the Savior was going to come through the descendants of the Jewish people. In order for that to happen, God had given them ceremonial laws to protect that promise. They despised the Gentile Christians because, from their perspective, The Gentiles weren't even trying to follow all of the Old Testament laws.

So, Paul needed to remind the Jewish people, that the purpose of the ceremonial laws was to protect the promise of a Savior. Once that Savior came, the laws were not needed any more. On the other hand, the Gentiles resented their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ because they made such a big deal about keeping all these extra laws. Yet they came up with so many loop holes to get around God's law while still claiming favored chosen status. So, what happened when they came to worship together? There were walls between the Jews and the Gentiles. So, what does Paul do? He encourages them to be united in Christ. There were some walls that needed to be knocked down.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."

Both groups were guilty of sin. It really didn't matter if they were trying to keep Old Testament ceremonial laws, which were no longer required of them, or not. It didn't really matter if they were both keeping the moral law, which God said were required to keep. They all fell short. Sin put a wall between both groups and God. That wall needed to come down. The only way that this wall could be knocked down was through Jesus. For it was on the cross that he brought peace to this world.

In many ways, we are not much different than these two groups of people. We may not be trying or not trying to keep ceremonial laws, but we are guilty of sin. In so many aspects in our lives, we build walls. Those walls show up in the form of sin that may include bitterness, mistrust, hatred, suspicion, anger, doubt, hurt feelings, and you know the list. The only way for these walls that we build around us to come down is through the cross.

That's the beauty of the Christian Church, isn't it? Paul writes: **"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."**

Just a few hours before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed for the church that he knew would be established after his death and resurrection. **“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.”** (John 17:11-12) In a sense, Paul is praying the same prayer for the believers in Ephesus.

Last week we talked about how Jesus has adopted us into his family. He takes us who are sinners and adopts us into his family. There, we now can call ourselves brothers and sisters in Christ. He doesn't do that on the basis of what we do. He does that on the basis of what Christ did on the cross. That's what our life is all about in Christ. There are days that our fellow believers will encourage us. There are days that they can encourage us. That's what a life united in Christ is all about.

Perhaps, sometimes we need to step back and take a look at ourselves, the way God sees us. When God looks at you, He sees people at peace with him because of what Christ has done. He sees you as a recipient of His overwhelming love and grace. That's how He sees others too. Knowing that we've got the same Lord, the same faith, the same forgiveness, the same grace available to us, the same Word and sacrament for strengthening, unites us together. It doesn't mean that we won't look at things in different ways. That's always true. God has made us different people. Sometimes it is those differences that make us stronger. If a basketball team can unite a city, at least for a little while, imagine what the cross of Jesus can do. May God help each of us to remained united in the cross of Jesus. Amen.