

“The Glue”
Ephesians 2:11-22
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
July 22, 2018

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by 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, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

INTRODUCTION:

**At the time Paul wrote this letter to the Church at Ephesus,
there was a deep division between Gentiles and Jews.**

**A Jew was a person born of the tribe of Judah or Benjamin.
The other tribes had been absorbed by invading forces.
You had to be born a Jew to be a Jew.
Everyone else was a Gentile.**

**Then there was the matter of circumcision;
according to the Torah,
all male Jews were circumcised.
It was an outward sign of the covenant
God had made with Abraham.**

**Because the Gentiles were not circumcised,
and not from the tribes of Judah or Benjamin,
they were considered “outsiders;”
offensive and unworthy of God.**

**Paul is addressing second-generation Christians
who are emerging in the Ephesian church.**

**He is basically reminding the people where they came from.
They had been Gentiles, pagans, outsiders,
not accepted into the covenant the Jews had with God;
which Jews believed made them “insiders.”**

**Not only were these “outsiders” outside the covenant,
they were considered to be without hope and without God;
they were denied the rights and privileges of citizenship.**

**Because those who converted from paganism to Christianity,
were not subject to the Jewish laws of the Torah,
they were thought to be “without God” by the Jews.**

**“Without God” was a cultural insult,
a form of hate speech.**

**Paul is reminding the Ephesian Christians,
that through the work and sacrificial death of Jesus,
God removed the barriers between Christians and Jews.**

**Circumcision which was an outward sign of a covenant
is no longer the required as part of the covenant with God.
Being circumcised in the flesh is not nearly as important
as being circumcised in the heart.**

**Whatever exists only in the flesh
cannot express God's new creation through Jesus Christ.**

**While it is true that the pagans' ignorance of God – and Christ –
had left them without hope
they were never forsaken by God,
they were just oblivious of God.**

**This is just an assessment of the reality which they were living,
it is not a judgment against them.**

So, there is this deep division between the Christians and the Jews.

**Ancient writing from the 3rd-century tell us
there was a debate between a Pagans and a Christians.**

**Celsus, the Pagan spokesperson declared
"When most teachers go forth to teach, they cry,
'Come to me, you who are clean and worthy.'"**

Therefore, their followers are the highest caliber of people available.

**But your silly master cries,
'Come to me, you who are down and beaten by life,'
and so, he accumulates around him
the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity."**

**Origen, one of the earliest Christian theologians, said:
"Yes, they are the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity.
But Jesus does not leave them that way.**

**Out of material you would have thrown away as useless,
he fashions people,
giving them back their self-respect,
enabling them to stand on their feet
and look God in the eyes.**

**They were cowed, cringing, broken things.
But the Son has set them free."**

REMINDER:

**Paul then reminds the Ephesian church
of the new life they are blessed with.**

**In doing so,
Paul uses an ancient hymn or confession of faith.**

In vs 14-18, we read:

¹⁴ For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

**Paul makes the confession of faith personal
by using the example of two people, two groups, divided.**

**Christ's sacrificial death makes it possible
for both groups to be combined into something new.
It is not that one is brought up to the level of the other.**

**As one of the early church theologians, Chrysostom pointed out,
It is as if “one could melt down silver and another lead,
and the two together should come out gold.”**

**Christ has removed the *reason* for the barrier
between the Gentiles and the Jews.**

Christ is the glue that combines all believers together.

**God’s plan was to unite the people into one single body.
That could only be accomplished through Christ.**

**For Paul, the church should never be split along socioeconomic,
ethnic, or gender lines.
It is to be unified.**

**The “barrier” or “wall” that Paul speaks of
is, in fact, a wall – a barrier –
in the ancient temple at Jerusalem.**

**It separated the Court of the Gentiles
from the temple proper.**

**On that barrier, there was a plaque which read:
“No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds
the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so
will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”**

BARRIERS:

Now, that’s a barrier!

**That wall represents prejudice –
- a burning issue between Gentiles and Jews.**

**Imagine how difficult it must have been
for either group to extend to the other
the right hand of fellowship.**

And . . .

One must ask:

**what are the walls WE have erected
to prevent “outsider” and “foreigners”
from worshipping with us?**

Sometimes, the barriers we erect are overt.

You’ve seen the signs:

No pets allowed.

We reserve the right to refuse service . . .

Whites Only

**Sometimes, the barriers are subtle and go unnoticed
except by those who are excluded.**

**For example, we use initials or acronyms that we understand
but which may be gibberish to others:**

PDA, COM, PCUSA, MIF, PW

**We allow our visitors to unscramble and translate
the worship bulletin on their own,
leaving them unsure and anxious about
when to read aloud and when to remain silent;
when to stand, etc.**

**These are not the only barriers,
sometimes the barriers are in our attitudes.**

**Mahatma Gandhi said he rejected Christianity
because Christians rejected him.**

He'd heard about our Jesus and he liked what he heard.
So, he went to church one Sunday.
But he didn't look like they did.
And he didn't act like they did.
And he didn't talk like they did.

So, they told him to go on down the street
to a church that was "like him."

He reportedly said:
If this how Christians treat others
"I might as well remain a Hindu."

So, let me ask again:
what barriers have we erected to prevent people
from coming to worship?

Robert Frost, the famous poet, wrote the "*Mending Wall*."

It's a wonderful poem - full of humor –
- and maybe a sense of sadness.

It is about two neighbors
who go through the same ritual each spring,
meeting at a wall that separates them,
in order to repair it.

To refill the gaps that the fallen stones have left.

The neighbors have apparently done this for many years
yet it strikes the narrator in the poem to question
just why it is that they have the wall in the first place.
They no longer have cows or sheep
that might stray onto the other's property.

So why is the wall there?

**The reason for its purpose no longer exists.
Yet, it remains . . . Why?**

The answer is: because it has always been there!

The truth is, it is human nature to construct walls.

**No age - or age group - has gone unshaped
by the malicious power of walls and barriers.**

Walls and barriers separates, fragments, and isolates.

Walls and barriers keep people apart.

- they separate the races**
- they separate religions**
- they separate gender**
- they separate the rich from the poor**
- they separate the educated from the uneducated**

**They kill fellowship, breed prejudices, spread gossip
and sets loose the dogs of war.**

**Walls and barriers take many forms
but they always remain divisions
and contrary to the will of God.**

CONCLUSION:

It is solely through Christ that Jew and Gentile are reconciled.

That was the message to the Ephesian church.

But that message is still valid today.

It is through Christ that all people can be reconciled.

**Yet, we cling to differences in our worship practices,
in our interpretation of scripture,
in our doctrine and dogma
to the point that we exclude each other.**

God's will is that cultural and religious divisions we construct are contrary to God's vision for human salvation and God's plans for the church.

In the Book of Order –

- see? That's another barrier to some.

What is this "Book of Order" anyway?

Basically, it is a compilation of the rules by which Presbyterians govern themselves.

Speaking directly to unity among Christians, the Book of Order It begins with a quote from Paul to the Galatian Church:

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:27–29).

It goes on to expound upon that quote:

The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church's membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

God's word says

**we are put together, joined together,
built together, members together,
heirs together, fitted together,
held together
and we will be caught up together!**

**For it is by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ
and the boundless love of God
that we are one body –
- with no barriers to separate us.**

PRAYER:

O God, the architect of the universe, we ask You to show us where we have built walls and erected barriers. Then give us the strength and courage to tear down those walls. That we will be welcoming and open to all who seek you in this house of worship. AMEN.