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July 21, 2024

The Peace of Christ
Ephesians 2:11-22

*So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth,^[b] 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**^[c] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[d]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**.^[e]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^[f] into a **dwelling place for God**.*

Right before these verses, in Ephesians 2:8-10:
It says that we are **saved by grace**,
And we are **prepared to do good works** on this earth.

Now Paul wants to tell us **what KIND of good** we need to be doing—
and it’s all about **PEACE**.

Bringing peace.

Announcing peace.

Not just any peace, but the peace of JESUS Christ.

Isn’t that something **we need to hear** right now?
Isn’t there a feeling of division all around us?
And some of those divisions are **hostile**!

There is true disdain, even hatred,
 for those who don't think, or act, or look the same way, right?
 It's horrible!
 It's *not what God wants, or intends* for any of us!

We hear so much talk today about *Us vs. them*.
 Some have said (which Robert Frost wrote),
that good fences make good neighbors.
 And we do need good boundaries in many situations.
 But we don't need *walls of hostility*.

And yet, we have a strong human *tendency to build walls*.
 And we often create walls through *hostility*--
 Both the *physical* structures, and the *invisible walls* between us.

You know what I'm talking about, right?
 There are walls everywhere, whether we see them or not--
 places where *only certain* people are welcome.
 And others are not.
 Places where those of a different color, orientation, or background are excluded.

And then there's *politics*.
 And the news that caters to *conservatives*,
 and different news that caters to *liberals*.
 And all the big talk about how the other side is horrible, evil,
 and ending America as we know it.

When you look carefully, almost *everything around us is divided*, right?
 We're divided over race, gender, orientation, class, politics,
 theology, and denominations!
 So where is the *HOPE*?

Paul saw similar divisions within the early church.
 Early Christians were *fighting about everything*.
 circumcision vs. uncircumcision,
 food sacrificed to idols.
 the role of women.
 the meaning of the resurrection.

In Ephesians 2 Paul specifically references the division between *Jews and Gentiles*—

Some of the *Jewish Christians* insisted that the Gentiles learn Jewish ways in order to become true Christ followers!
Some insisted they needed circumcision
To be true believers.

So Paul reminds the early church that Jesus has *ended all such division*.
He has *torn down the dividing walls of hostility* in his death on the cross!

Paul says:

*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....
that he might create in himself ONE new humanity in place of the two...*

Today, we may not relate to divisions of *Jew or Gentile*,
But we do know about *Republican or Democrat--*
Conservative or Liberal
male or female
white or black
gay or straight.
We ALL know what it is to be divided, don't we?

The question is, *what do we DO about it?*
What are we *CALLED to do*, as Christians?

You know, Paul says that there's a *REASON* Jesus broke down the dividing walls.
There's a *reason He is our peace*.
It's because *Jesus himself is the cornerstone.*^[e] ²¹ *.... a holy temple in the Lord;*
²² *in whom you also are built together spiritually*^[f] *into a dwelling place for God.*

Today we are known as the body of Christ.
So---We are united, so WE might *become the Temple, the dwelling place for God*.
Not just each of us in our own hearts,
But *all believers TOGETHER*.
We are where God dwells.
Church is *not just* a place to *attend* worship,
it's a place where *God dwells among us!*

God is here with us---RIGHT NOW.
And we need UNITY in this place.
 We can't have walls that divide us!

Remember what happened when Jesus took his last breath on the cross?
 The Bible says that the ***curtain of the temple was torn in two.***
 In the ***Temple*** of Jesus' day, there were walls and a curtain.
 There was a ***dividing wall*** between the Outer Court of the Gentiles,
 and the inner section where Jews could worship.
And Gentiles could be killed for crossing that wall!

And there was a ***curtain***,
 separating the main temple, from the Holy of Holies,
 the place where only the priest could enter into the presence of God.

When Jesus died on the cross, ***that temple CURTAIN was torn.***
 In other words, ***the division*** between the people and the presence of God,
was torn down, forever!

So, Jesus' death on the cross was not only a ***victory of good over evil***,
 it was one of ***peace over division.***
 It ***opened the door to God***,
And it opened the door to unity, and peace among God's people.

In the Bible the word for peace is ***SHALOM.***
 Shalom is a ***powerful idea*** that means so much more than peace.
 It means ***wholeness, completeness,***
Unity, restored relationships.
 It is a word that describes the overall well-being of an individual
 and a community.

Shalom is a ***key word in the Bible.***
 It is found 250 times in the Old Testament,
 and 91 times in the New Testament.

In the scriptures the Messiah was known as the ***Prince of Peace*** in Isaiah 9.
 In the Gospels, the angels announced the birth of Jesus,
 And the coming of ***peace*** in Luke 2.

Shalom is **established** by our God of peace in Isaiah 11,
Who brings a new kingdom, where the *wolf will lie down with the lamb...*

Shalom is what our Savior, brings **us**.

Isaiah 53:5 says *But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us **whole** (the word whole is shalom).*

Colossians 1 says that **Christ has made peace** through the blood of the cross.
And Romans 5:1 says, *having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Shalom is also what God brings to our own **hearts**—

Isaiah 26:3 says *God will keep us in perfect peace...*

Shalom was important **to Jesus**.

And it was clear that the peace he offered
was **different** than the peace of the world.

In **John 14:27**, he says that:

*Peace, I give to you, **MY** peace I give, not as the world gives....*

Shalom was equally important to **Paul**.

Paul **begins and ends all** of his letters by wishing people **grace and peace**.

He concludes Romans by saying *the peace of God be with you.*

In Galatians 6:16 he prays *the God of peace teach us to walk in paths of peace,*
in Philippians 4:7 he prays that *the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, would guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

You know why we **pass the peace of Christ** in worship?

It's not just a greeting!

It is an acknowledgment that the **peace in our lives is from Christ**.

We shake hands, and greet one another as broken people,

who have been brought near to God

by Jesus!

We are **forgiven**, and we pass that grace and peace to one another!

Our true peace, shalom, comes from Jesus,

So passing the Peace is a **proclamation of that good news!**

What if we thought of that when we pass the peace of Christ?

The peace we believe in, the shalom,
Is NOT something we ourselves can create.

But we can *find it in Jesus.*

We can *work towards* his peace.

And we can *share it* with the world!

In fact, that is our *calling.*

To be *peacemakers*, in the name of Jesus.

We are called to *follow Paul who said in Galatians 3:28:*

There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free,

there is no longer male or female;

for all of you are ONE in Christ Jesus.

So, does this mean *we can see true peace* in our world?

Yes and No.

We see *glimpses of it ...but not total fulfillment.*

The peace of Christ is *already* given to us at the cross,

but it is *not yet* perfected this side of heaven.

Does this mean we *do peacemaking differently*
 than those who are not Christian?

Yes, because we share the peace of Jesus,
 not our own ideas of peace.

So, my friends *how is God calling US—you and I—*
to break down dividing walls?

How are WE called to *work toward UNITY and peace?*

One obvious way, right now,

Is by seeing ourselves as *ONE church. One new congregation.*

Not FPC and LPC, but the body of Christ, together.

A new, merged, vibrant family of faith!

Another way we are called to unity and peace is *by listening*
 to those who see things differently.

Fellowship Hour is a great time to do this!

We find people from different backgrounds and perspectives talking and listening
 to one another!

Friendship Dinners are also a gift from God!

And outreach like VBS, or our Craft Fair and Flea Market,

Or the CROP Walk, and so much more—
 We can ***foster unity and peace***, as we come together to do God’s work!

In 2017, a movement called ***The People’s Supper began***,
 Where people of different ideas and backgrounds gather around a dinner table,
 with a facilitator, and discussion questions,
 to help people who are different ***come together,***
in understanding, and peace.
 It helps people see one another as—***people***, children of God.
 Not the enemy, Or “us” vs. “them”.

Listen to some of their ***suggested discussion questions***:

Talk about a time you felt welcome, and safe.

Talk about a time you felt excluded and unwelcome.

Talk about a spiritual practice giving you strength right now.

Amy Frykholm, Christian Century July 4, 2018.

<https://thepeoplesupper.org/what-we-do>

Other groups have sought to do something similar around our country.
 Do you know what all of these projects have in ***common***?
 A desire for ***unity, and community***—***NOT hostility and division.***
A desire for PEACE.

Isn’t that ***OUR desire too?***

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today.

Jesus Christ IS our peace.

In his death on the cross, He has ***torn down the dividing wall of hostility,***
 and ***brought us together in his body, the church.***

He has ***united*** us--as brothers and sisters—into a ***dwelling place for God.***

May we ***live out*** that peace, and ***work toward that unity.***

And for this calling, all God’s people can say together, Amen.