

Sermon on **Ephesians 2:13-22** for 12th Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf 8.16.26

I don't like conflict. I know there is "healthy" conflict which is necessary and helpful. But more often unhealthy conflict creeps in – born from pride, selfishness, impatience and envy. It divides. People form walls and silo themselves or their group, break the 8th commandment, degrade into lovelessness and other sins. It divides co-workers, boss + employee, friends, classmates, teammates, families, siblings, even spouses. What about conflict with God? What about conflict in Christ's church? Paul addresses the Ephesians about the wall which divided them and what Jesus did for them. Jesus changed their relationship (and your relationship) with God and with one another forever.

Jesus Took Down the Wall to Build God's House Big Enough for All.

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. 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.

We know from the book of Acts that Paul spent a lot of time with the Ephesian church – well over two years. He loved them. He had seen Jews come to faith, and many Gentiles come to know their Savior. Some Gentiles who had practiced sorcery burned their scrolls publicly (Acts 19). It was awesome. But, there were problems there like any congregation. There was conflict and the potential for conflict with this mixed bunch. The Jews loved to point back to the Law with all its ceremonies and traditions. The name "uncircumcised" could be lobed at the Gentile believers. The Jews mistakenly thought the law was their way to get right with God – Jesus relegated to a coach. They would be circumcised, follow the ceremonial laws, be good, do good, check boxes, and they would be right with God. Wrong. The Law only condemns and shows our great, deplorable need, not a source of salvation or pride. The Gentiles had been in darkness so long, it would be easy to like the thought of Jesus but think God has no will for them and his commands are only suggestions. Wrong. The wall of the law separated them, and both were alienated from God in their sin.

Do you (and I) do this to each other? The every-Sunday worshipper who attends Bible Classes, sings in the choir, gives generously with gifts and talents begins to think, "God needs me. God is a little more pleased with me than the rest because of all I do for him. I get it, while these others don't. Will they ever learn?" Wrong. A wall is built. On the other side is the not so every Sunday member who thinks God was serious about only some of his commands and his law is more a negotiation. "I'll do what I think is right for me and if it lines up with God's Word, fine, but it doesn't have to." Worship is for when I have time, or when life has got me down, or there is nothing better to do. Wrong. A wall is built. Both stand opposed to God. Like in Ephesus – both have broken views of the law. This conflict is unhealthy, deadly, divisive. God's law is perfect and we have perfectly broken it. We deserve God's wrath.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who were once 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 dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations." Jesus knew you were "far away," "divided," even "hostile," as Pastor Guenther said last week "spiritual zombies" dead and

enemies of God. So Jesus, the Son of God took on flesh. He viewed the law rightly. He respected it. He loved his Father and everyone perfectly. He lived according to the law which condemns us perfectly. He offered that perfect life to his father for your account – for the one of Jewish background, the one of Gentile background – for all he fulfilled the law perfectly.

“In his flesh” Paul writes. He took all our hostility, our unhealthy conflicts, our judging, our carelessness, all our sin. Jesus suffered God’s wrath to take down that wall which condemned us and separated us. *“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.”* *“In his flesh, through the cross, by the blood of Christ,”* you are reconciled to God. You are forgiven. You have peace in Christ Jesus. *“For he himself is our peace.”* **Jesus Took Down the Wall to Build God’s House Big Enough for All.**

So now what? What did this mean for those who followed Christ of Jew and Gentile background in Ephesus? What does this mean for us of different backgrounds, different cultures, different traumas and trials, dysfunctions and weaknesses and strengths, and time being a Christian whether life- long or new? *“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.”* We are all saved the same way. We all have access to the Father through Jesus, through his blood shed for us. God hears you. Jesus has taken away your conflict. He *“has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”* You all have one Father – God, and you have his Spirit living in you. You are united. Don’t build new walls in your heart or walls of pride, envy, selfishness.

When Teddy was getting ready to go off to basic training, we realized we wouldn’t hear from him for weeks. He would be out of the bubble so to speak of St. Paul’s, Luther Prep and MVL, MLC, our house. Hannah and I reminded him, “Remember who you are – a child of God.” Paul reminds us of our identity here – *“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.”* You belong. God is not just Minnesota nice-ing you with a big smile and wave, giving you directions anywhere but his house. He doesn’t just wave from the porch. He invites you in to stay forever. You have a room, a seat at the table. You belong. God’s Word says it. This house is built on the Word – the Bible – the prophets and apostles, and Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone by which we all line up, by which we find God’s love and will for us – our eternities changed.

God’s people were always to be a light to unbelievers living in darkness. When the temple was built and then rebuilt it was to be a place where all nations could stream to the Lord, *“a house of prayer for all nations”* (Is.56:7). We don’t need the temple anymore. God has given Christ, and given you, all of you. In Christ you are the building, 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.”* You aren’t left out. You are chosen and mortared in by Jesus AND mortared together right next to one another. The Holy Spirit lives in you. You are a light to those around you. You are one body, one building, God’s dwelling, reconciled by the cross. You are family. You belong. God had destroyed your conflict with him and with one another. **Jesus Took Down the Wall to Build God’s House Big Enough for All.** That includes you. Live it together in Christ. Amen.