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One in 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.*

Last week we talked about Ephesians chapter 1 and the **blessings**,
The **lavish grace and love of God in our lives**.

As Paul continues in the letter, he lays out **even more good news**.
In Ephesians 2:1-10, he says that we have been **saved by grace**
(not our own good works)—a hallmark of our Reformed theology.
And then he says that this salvation leads us
to do the good works God intends for us to do!

That is the **context** of verses 11-22.
We are **blessed**, we are **saved by grace**,
we are **prepared to do good** 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.

Wow.

Talk about something *we need to hear* right now.

All of us- our whole world.

We all need *the Good News of peace*, don't we?

Aren't we so *divided*?

Aren't we *hostile* in many of our divisions?

So many have true disdain, even hatred,

for those who don't think, or act, or look the same way, you know?

It's horrible.

It's *not what God wants, or intends* for any of us, is it?

We hear so much talk today about *walls, and dividing lines*.

Some have said (which Robert Frost wrote),

that good fences make good neighbors.

And we do need boundaries in many situations.

But we don't need *walls of hostility*.

There in lies the problem.

And so many times, *a wall goes up with deep hostility*.

We have a strong human *tendency to build walls*.

We've been building them since the beginning of time.

But we've also seen the *hostility that creates* some of those walls,

Both the *physical* structures, and the *invisible walls* between us.

You know what I'm talking about, right?

places where *only white* people are welcome.

places *only the wealthy* can shop.

places where *only men* are invited.

places where the news reaches out to *conservatives*,

and different places where the news reaches out to *liberals*.

There are walls everywhere, whether you see them or not, right?

Seems like almost *everything is divided*, doesn't it?

And aren't the **divisions stronger** than ever?
 We're divided over race, gender, orientation, class, political party,
 theology, and denominations!
 And all too often these divisions are
 They are not just boundaries—they are **walls of hostility**.

Paul saw such division within the early church.
 Early Christians were **fighting about everything**.
 About circumcision vs. uncircumcision—who is a real Christian?
 About food sacrificed to idols.
 About the role of women.
 About the meaning of the resurrection.

In Ephesians 2 Paul specifically references the division
 between **Jews and Gentiles**—
 the Gentiles who were not part of the people Israel,
 but were welcomed in by Jesus, and Paul, and the early church.
 But not without much controversy!

Some of the **Jewish Christians** insisted that these pagans
 learn the Jewish ways in order to become true Christ followers!
 Some insisted they needed circumcision
 (which only Jews practiced as a sign of God's covenant).
 Jews didn't want to associate with the lowly, unclean Gentiles!

So Paul reminds the early church that Jesus has **ended this division**.
 He has ended **all** division.
 He has **torn down all the hostile dividing walls** 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,*

Now today we may not be able to relate to divisions of **Jew or Gentile**,
 But what about **Republican or Democrat?**

What about ***Conservative or Liberal?***

What about ***male or female?***

What about ***white or black?***

We all know what it is to be divided, and to lack peace, don't we?

The question is, ***what do we do about it?***

What are we ***called to do***, as Christians?

Paul says that there's a ***reason*** Jesus broke down the dividing walls.

There's a ***reason He is our peace.***

It's because he is the *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.*

We are untied, 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 become the place where God dwells.

Church is ***not just*** a place to ***attend*** worship,

And it's not just all of us together,

it's a place where ***God dwells among us!***

We need unity to have a ***firm foundation*** in this holy dwelling!

We can't have walls that divide!

Remember what happened when Jesus finally breathed his last on the cross?

It 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 of the Temple where Jews could worship.

Gentiles could be killed for crossing that wall!

But there was also 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, ***that division*** between the people and the presence of God,

was torn down, forever!

This is what Paul is reminding us—
 that Jesus' death on the cross was a ***victory of good over evil,***
 and ***peace over hostility.***
 Jesus' death ***opened the door to true unity.***
 It opened the door for ***peace.***

In the Bible the word for peace is used today for greeting people in Israel.
 Do you remember the word, I was talking to the kids about today?
 It's ***shalom.***

Shalom is a very ***powerful idea*** that means so much more than peace.
 Shalom means ***wholeness, completeness,***
unity and restored relationship.
 It is a word that describes the overall well-being of an individual
 or 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, as the angels announced the birth of Jesus,
 they announced the coming of peace in Luke 2.

Shalom is ***established*** by our God of peace,
 Who brings a new kingdom, as we read in Isaiah,
who says, one day the wolf will lie down with the lamb....

Shalom is what our Savior, the Messiah, brings ***us.***
 Isaiah 53:5 says that *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our **peace** was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

Colossians 1 says that ***Christ has made peace*** through the blood of the cross.
 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 ***hearts***—

Isaiah 26:3 says *God will keep us in perfect peace, those whose minds are kept on God, who trust in God.*

Shalom was an important **word for Jesus**.

He used it often.

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

In **John 14:27**, he says: *Peace, I give to you, my peace I give, not as the world gives....*

For Jesus, peace was part of the new kingdom of God.

Shalom was equally familiar to the **apostle Paul**.

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

Grace and peace from God our Father, grace and peace,

these were his greetings and prayers,

like when 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.*

But there are also some **powerful words** about peace in **Ephesians**.

Apparently, they needed a message of peace.

Don't we need it today?

Remember what I was telling the kids about why we **pass the peace of Christ** in worship?

It's more than just a greeting, or a way to say hello!

It is acknowledging 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

through the death of Jesus!

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

Isn't that amazing?

Our true peace comes from Jesus,
and through Him we can have shalom,
with all our brothers and sisters.

Passing the Peace is a **proclamation of the good news!**

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

The peace we believe in, the shalom,
Is not something we can create ourselves.
We can't make peace.
 But we can ***find it in Jesus.***
 And we can ***share it*** with the world!

In fact, that is our ***calling.***
 To be ***peacemakers***, in the name of Jesus Christ.
 We are called to ***follow Paul who said in Galatians 3:28:***
*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.*

Does this mean ***we will see true peace*** in our world?
Yes and No.
 We'll see ***glimpses of the reality in the kingdom of God!***
 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 received it from Jesus,
 we can step in seemingly hopeless situations,
 because we are bringing Christ's peace—not our own agenda.

So, ***how is God calling US to break down dividing walls?***
 How are WE called to ***work toward unity?***

Do you have ***friends who are vastly different*** from you—
 in color, belief, background, orientation, or politics?
 I bet you do!
How do you get along?
 How might that work with people ***you don't even know as well?***

Over the past couple of years,
 many Christians have sought to break down the dividing walls,
 by bringing ordinary people with differences together—
around a meal—which is very Biblical, isn't it?

Some of these are called ***The People's Supper***.

Where folks gather around a dinner table,
with a facilitator, and some suggested discussion questions,
to help people who are very different come together.
It helps people see one another as—people.....Children of God.
Not as the enemy.Not as “them”.
But as a ***united group of brothers and sisters***.

Listen to some of the ***suggested discussion starters*** for these dinners:
How and when did you learn about being a citizen?
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.

It's such a great idea—and since 2017,
there have been more than 1000 People's Suppers around the country.

And you know what else?

Many others have similar ideas about bringing different people together!
In Boston college students created ***“Hi, From the Other Side”***, to bring very
different people together online.

In Maryland, there's something called the ***Listen First Project***.

In California, there a ***Know Your Neighbor***. Amy Frykholm, Christian Century July 4,
2018.

Do you know what all of these have in ***common***?

A desire for ***unity, and community—not hostility and division***.

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 calling, and ***work to see that unity*** in our world.

And to that all God's people said, Amen.