



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, July 17-23 (B) – Ephesians 2:11-22

Focus: *Christ Our Peace*

word of life

“So [Christ] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. . .” Ephesians 2:17 (NRSV)

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

It must been both exciting and bewildering to be one of those first followers of Jesus. What was God doing after the resurrection of Jesus in forming a new community – the church? Was the risen Christ intended only for the Jews? Might God intend to share Christ with the whole world – with outsiders like the Gentiles?

The Apostle Paul was instrumental in opening the doors of the church to Gentiles (those who were not Jewish). He traveled beyond Jerusalem and Israel to tell the story of Jesus and establish house churches. His missionary work to the Gentiles rapidly expanded the early church to be an inclusive and diverse faith community.

Many scholars believe Ephesians was written by a follower of Paul after the Gentiles were well established members of the church. This section of Ephesians reflects the strain between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians in creating the church.

1. *What might cause strain and tension between the Gentiles and Jews of the first century?*
2. *Describe walls which might separate followers of Jesus.*

Unity for Christians – be it Gentile and Jew, male or female, rich or poor – is possible only through the Christ. God does something new in Christ and creates a new humanity through Christ in the church, reconciling all to God. “For [Christ] 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.” (Ephesians 2:14 NRSV) Christ reconciles us to God and to our neighbor.

3. *How does Christ break down walls which divide?*
4. *What might we expect from the church in regards to peace?*

The sum of Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) is all humanity. God intends to create a new humanity, not divided into sub-groups with laws, commandments, and ordinances. Instead God’s intention is to reconcile all people to God. “So [Christ] proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.” (Ephesians 2:17 NRSV)

5. *When Christ proclaimed peace, who are the people described as “far off” and “near”?*
6. *How might God use the church (and its people) to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation?*

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. . .” (Ephesians 2:19 NRSV) In God’s household, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. “In [Christ] the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” (Ephesians 2:21-22 NRSV) What a breathtaking temple established by God, filled with persons from diverse backgrounds who invite God to dwell in their hearts and lives.

7. *What does it mean for you to be a dwelling place for God?*

word *among us*

People quietly and quickly found their seats in the small sanctuary. The guest pastor began to lead worship and all was going well. That is until the passing of the peace. The pastor encouraged the congregation to get out of their comfort zone and pass the peace with every person in the sanctuary. There would be enough time to share God's peace with one another. The pastor assumed this small congregation would want to pass the peace with everyone.

But no one had mentioned to the guest pastor that the congregation typically skips the passing of the peace. Some years ago, the church had a heated debate over an issue. The outcome was a divided church with both groups insisting on staying. They would all worship at the same time in the sanctuary, but without any interaction.

1. *Does God intend such divisions in the church? Explain.*
2. *How did the passing of the peace of Christ disrupt the dividing wall in this congregation?*
3. *What would you want to tell this congregation?*
4. *What makes it difficult to reconcile with others?*

We in the church are not intended to be strangers from one another. Unfortunately, we in the church can become far off from one another and distant from God. Nevertheless, God continues to reach out, breaking down walls and hostility. "So [Christ] proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father." (Ephesians 2:17 NRSV)

5. *Name some of the dividing walls within today's church.*
6. *How do you see Christ at work breaking down walls and hostility?*

faith practice *in daily life*

Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

Jesus proclaimed peace to those near and far. That proclamation of Christ continues in this time and place. The writer of Ephesians describes how God sent Christ to break down walls which divide. Christ is the instrument of peace and also the messenger of peace.

God's intention has always been reconciliation so that a new humanity might be formed. In Christ, we are reconciled to each other and to God.

7. *Share a story of reconciliation within the church.*
8. *Where in your life do you need reconciliation?*
9. *What prevents you from being an instrument of reconciliation and God's ambassador of peace?*
10. *How might you strive for peace in all the earth?*

Prayer

God of peace, you sent Christ to be our peace and to break down the walls which divide and separate. Bring peace to our lives, reconcile our broken relationships, and use us as instruments of peace. Amen.

last word

Pray for God to show ways
you might be an instrument of reconciliation and peace.