

Ephesians 2:11-22: One in Christ
Sermon for MBCCC by Dr. Katelyn Brackney
Sunday, September 13, 2026

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth,^[a] called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a 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 into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing 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 to God in one body^[b] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[c] 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 fellow 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;^[d] 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^[e] into a dwelling place for God.

Our text today begins with a “so then...” which tells us that there’s a little context we should know as we head into this part of the text. Paul is writing to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus, and leading up to our text today, there’s a lot of talk about adoption, God’s mercy, and right before our we began today, a quick mention that “we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works....” Then we pick up with a “so then” which means, if these things are true, if they have been brought into God’s family, if God’s mercy is ever abundant, if we have been created by God for good works, which is what Paul is saying,....here’s what that means.

So, Paul is reminding or informing this community, who would have been primarily Gentile Christians (non-jewish Christians) what it means to be in community with God and others, especially when people are different than you; which would have been important as they would have been encountering other Christian communities made up of people who were not like them, primarily, Jewish Christians. (which is why we get the language around circumcision and uncircumcision).

He shares that it is through Christ's peace and self-sacrifice of love that we have been brought near, and that nearness, that proximity, along with the peace of Christ, leads to the dividing wall of hostility being taken down, creating a new unified community – this is one of the ways the kingdom of the God is brought “on earth as it is in heaven”. Christ has come near to us in order to bring true peace, which breaks down any barriers keeping us from forming true community.

That imagery of the dividing wall of hostility is striking to me. When we think of a wall we may think of a block, something that contains or keeps out. Perhaps we imagine a room of walls, perhaps a wall that acts as a fence or barrier, but whatever you're picturing, I think we can say we've experienced moments that feel like walls, too. Especially when we encounter conflict or people we are uncertain of, or even don't like, whether we are the ones putting up the walls or running into them, we know the icy feeling of a relational barrier or the hostility between people where trust or relationship has been broken. Last week I talked about the work of reconciliation as a way we embody love of neighbor, and this week's text invites similar work as this “dividing wall, that is the hostility between us” crumbles when the peace of Christ is allowed to take hold of our lives.

But it is important for us to not fall into an expectation of homogeneity or sameness when we think about that wall breaking down and a unified community being formed. This community, as one body, is not one that values uniformity, expecting everyone to become the same, but unity in diversity – valuing what makes us different and seeing those things as gifts to receive, not problems to solve. For the community in Ephesus this would have meant Jews and Gentiles living together in community through the peace and reconciliation of Christ, which was pretty radical at the time, and to some, maybe even still today. Hear these words again:

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 into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing 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 to God in one body^[1] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[2] 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 fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God...

It's talking about breaking down hostility, abolishing laws and commands that create division and instead, creating one body where both receive generous hospitality and have access to God through the peace that Christ proclaims to all, whether those who are distant or those who are near, and that welcome brings folks together.

One commentary said, "Although the emphasis of the passage is on oneness, the writer repeatedly states that this unity is created from two groups, who represent

different customs, traditions, and perspectives. Unity between the two groups comes about not by one group giving up its identity to become like the other. Rather, unity arises from their shared identity in Christ...the peace effected in Christ is a “good news” message, proclaimed to all, without preference and without reference to their former proximity to God.” ([Working Preacher – Holly Hearon](#))

I couldn’t help but think about the practice of “passing the peace” as I read this. Sometimes when we’re in service on Sundays, I’m sure there are pieces that we don’t like or don’t know or remember why we do them, and sometimes things just become habit. But as I listened to this text and the ways it talks about Christ’s welcome, and heard phrases like “he is our peace,” and “So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,” it made me reflect on what we’re actually aiming for when we practice passing the peace at the beginning service each week.

As someone who is new to this community I find myself reflecting on various parts of the service as we continue to discern together who we are and what we are called to do and to be. And I firmly believe the church (be C church) is called to be a place of peace and welcome, so if the peace of Christ is our foundation, or cornerstone, as this text says, if that is where we come from each week as we enter our time of worship– as we welcome new faces and greet those we’ve known a long time – “those who are far and those who are near,” and we do so with intention, I wonder if, *or how*, that might help shape us to be people who allow dividing walls to crumble and make space for a new community, both in this space and the others we inhabit. When we proclaim “peace” how are we both extending peace to others, and reminding ourselves to be a people of peace? I wonder how it might “build us together spiritually” like our text today talks

about when we pass the peace of Christ, both as a greeting and a posture for who we are.

I think that's a particularly vital call for the church today - to be a place founded in Christ's peace. And that peace is something we can, and should, extend to all. And that's not always easy, nor does it always feel peaceful (especially when we think of peace as peace-keeping, or maintaining a status quo), but it is the work of peace-making, where we are partnering with God to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. As a church family we should do what we can to ensure "no one is to be treated as a stranger or alien. Differences in race, class, gender, economic condition, politics, and opinion exist, but [as we see in today's text] they are not barriers to living in unity in Christ." ([Working Preacher - Arland J. Hultgran](#)) The church should be a model for this, we should be a model for this. Not only is it something that's very "congregational" as we value free thought and exploration, but it's also who we are called to be and what we're called to do as people of God. We're seeking to be a place and a people who embody the love and peace of God in a way that isn't aiming for uniformity, but unity in diversity - seeing the image of God in each person we encounter, and welcoming them with the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding. And providing that peaceful welcome continues to be a radical work and good news.

In my previous work I taught an Intro to Christian Faith course at a Christian university, and in that course we talked about the church being a "demonstration plot." A demonstration plot, if you're not familiar, is a plot of land where new farming technologies are demonstrated. Farmers can stop by and see these new practices in action, learn about them, and decide if they want to bring them to their own farm. The church then, is God's demonstration plot in the world. It is a space where the kingdom of God can be displayed, so that other people can see what it looks like to live in the world in this way, and gain

inspiration and invitation to try this new way of living in their own lives. The church exists so that other people can see what the kingdom of God looks like, and hopefully, if we're faithfully living in step with God and each other, it looks like a community of diverse people who live out their love of God and neighbor in such a way that this new way of living feels, perhaps a bit radical, but also like a soft place to land in the midst of a world that often pits us against one another. It is Christ's love and peace embodied.

And so as we prepare to come to the table today, I can't think of a better place to celebrate the welcome of God to all. As we partake of the bread and cup here in a few moments, may we do so carrying the peace of Christ with us and then continue to extend that to those who gather with us around tables, at the gas station, in grocery lines and coffee shops, in meetings, and across aisles of political and social difference. May we allow the dividing walls that keep us from one another to crumble just a bit more each day as we embody Christ's welcome and love.

Amen