

The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

August 9, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this 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 aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's 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. (NIV)

On June 12, 1987 President Ronald Reagan delivered one of the most memorable speeches of the 20th century. He stood at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, demanding the destruction of the Berlin Wall. That barrier had closed off East Berlin from West Berlin for more than 25 years and symbolized the Cold War struggle between the communist Soviet Union and the democracies of Western Europe and the United States. Addressing Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, he famously exhorted him, "*Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall!*"

The physical wall stood from 1961 to 1989, but it symbolized the ideals that separated the peoples of Europe from the end of World War II until the mostly peaceful democratic revolutions of 1989. Both the physical and the ideological walls sealed off peoples, nations and cities from interacting with one another.

This morning our text turns our attention to some other dividing walls. These walls also separated people from one another. Even worse, these dividing walls separated people from God. But these walls too have come tumbling down. As we hear God's Word today we can rejoice in the fact that: **Jesus destroys the dividing walls of hostility.**

Paul with these words had been addressing Gentiles. They are the ones who were once far away. There was indeed a great wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. To the Jew a Gentile was unclean. They were the uncircumcised. Jews and Gentiles usually did not even talk to one another and for Jews to travel through Gentile territory could be dangerous. While we can't defend the sinful attitudes that developed into bias and hostility, part of the reason a dividing wall was there was God's doing. Israel was for a time to be a separate nation from the rest of the Gentile world. While God's moral law (the ten commandments) applied to everyone, God also gave specific civil and ceremonial laws and regulations to the people of Israel. And for good reason. God didn't want them to be like the rest of the world that bowed down to idols. He wanted

them to be separate. The Lord wanted them to be a light for all nations to see His grace and promises.

The result over this long period of separation was a great dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. The prejudices were strong, the animosity ran deep, and the hatred was great. How could such a wall ever be brought down? How could these relationships ever be reconciled?

Perhaps we should start by looking at another wall that existed. This one was even greater. The two sides even further apart. This wall was one between God and all people. Jews and Gentiles were on the same side in this one. So are we. All our prejudices and bias's and hatreds and animosities are reminders of this wall. This wall that exists is a wall of sin. It separates us from God. While God is good, our hearts are evil and our actions sinful from birth. While God is love, we are selfish and self serving. I'm sure I don't have to even list specific examples for we know it is true. Earlier in this chapter Paul describes us as having been dead in sin, people who like to gratify the cravings of our sinful desires, and by nature people who are objects of God's wrath. Paul writes in Romans: ***"The mind of sinful man is death...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."*** (8) In short, we were God's enemies. We were as far apart as two sides could ever be.

So how did all this change? What happened between Jew and Gentile that our text could now say that the two have become one? How in the world could there ever be peace between a holy God and rotten to the core sinners like you and me? How could a relationship so broken ever be fixed? How could enemies so hostile ever reconcile? These beautiful words of our text tell us, don't they? ***"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."***

Jesus destroyed the dividing walls of hostility - between God and man - between Jews and Gentiles. We are no longer far off but have been brought near - joined together by the blood of Christ. Those laws and regulations that applied to Israel alone were no longer needed when the baby named Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly for us and paid the penalty for our sins. He fixed the relationship between all people and God through the cross. He who was raised from the grave is our peace. Now the message is the same for all of us. ***"He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."***

The results are also the same for all of us. We all have, through Jesus, ***"access to the Father by one Spirit."*** We who have been brought to faith in Jesus as our Savior are no longer outsiders, but we are full-fledged citizens. We are all family members with every right and privilege. We are together a great house, a temple being built squarely upon Jesus and His Word handed down to us through the prophets and apostles. We are in fact a dwelling where God Himself now lives. So there is no difference. We are all alike under sin. We are all justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came

by Jesus Christ. All barriers have been broken by Jesus. All walls of hostility have been destroyed by the Christ.

Isn't that wonderful news? The walls have come crumbling down. The sin that stood between God and us - the sin that stands between us and our fellow man, is forgiven. Think about the great fellowship we share through the blood of Christ. It is one we will enjoy in an outward and special way in a few minutes as together we come to the altar as brothers and sisters united in faith and love to receive our Savior's own body and blood for our forgiveness.

Before we approach this altar I pray we remember how Jesus went about destroying all the dividing walls of hostility. Jesus didn't come with a great army or build up amazing weapons of power, but instead set aside His power and became weak. Jesus became a slave to all men. Jesus didn't destroy the walls that existed by giving some great presidential speech demanding that things change and all hostility be put aside. Instead, Jesus willingly faced God's hostility for us - the Son suffered the price of being God's enemy. Jesus became obedient to death even death on a cross. Now He is our peace. Now the great wall of sin that separated us from God is no longer. Now we are able to live at peace with God and with one another. Now we want all, regardless of their race or culture, to be a part of our family and live in our home where we enjoy every spiritual blessing in Christ. Now we want all who are still far off to be brought near through the blood of Jesus. Now we rejoice in this truth of God's Word: ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"***(Galatians 3). Amen