

MESSAGE - "Brought Together"

Ephesians 2:11-21

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Last week I invited us to step back and take a long view; a balcony view of who we are. Because sometimes we can get so caught up in the daily activities of church that we can lose sight of who we are in Christ. The beginning of the letter to the Ephesians reminds us: We are Chosen. We are Redeemed. We are Marked.

But that's not the only long view this letter calls us to recognize. The other long view is God's endgame – the trajectory of God's plan. The purpose for why we are chosen, redeemed, and marked.

The letter to the Ephesians clues us into God's endgame: vs. 1:9-10 – to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Let's listen.

Ephesians 2:11-21

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

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To gather up all things: that's a huge goal considering what God has to work with: Jews and Gentiles. But Ephesians is clear: there is a "what was"; there is a "what is" and there is a "what will be"

#### What was:

The writer acknowledges how things have been:

- People who were supposed to be close to God: Jews, born as descents of the 12 tribes of Jacob, known as Israel. They were the people God rescued from the Egyptians through mighty acts. They were the ones to whom the Law was given. They were the ones whose purpose was to "be a light to the Gentiles".
- People who are considered far from God: Gentiles; anyone who is not a Jew. They were not considered by Jews to be included by God; foreigners to the relationship between God and humanity

Their lives were so vastly separate from one another; differences seen in what they ate, how they dressed, how they washed, how they worshipped, and what their art, academics, language, and social customs looked like. Even their architecture was different. At the center of the Jewish culture were the Hebrew Bible and the writings of their rabbis. Jews believed in one transcendent God who created the universe and everything in it. The Hellenistic culture in the area was more of a blending of cultures and traditions including Greek and Roman mythology, morality, philosophy, and politics.

This makes God's endgame (to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth) complex. Because these two groups are not interested in being "gathered up". They are "hostile" toward each other.

#### What is:

Everyone – Jews and Gentiles - have peace extended to them

All are in need of a restored relationship with God

And all are in need of grace because no one is capable of creating that restored relationship ourselves.....I mean, after all, if we were, then why would it need to be restored in the first place?

*Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

What is...

Peace for those who were far off – the Gentiles. Jesus instituted this through his ministry:

Cross over to the other side.....he was going to the decapolis...a set of 10 greek cities....

Peace for those who were near – the Jews. Jesus was a Jew...began his ministry within that tradition to bring close to God those who have always claimed their place as close to God...

What is.....Access to God for both, not just for a preferred group.

What will be – the endgame; the ultimate purpose:

“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup>and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Now there obviously was still a struggle going on in which the two groups were having a hard time reconciling their differences and their hostilities. How could they be “one new humanity” from two?

They wrestled with whether Gentiles needed to become Jewish in order to become Christian...become a part of this one new humanity.

They wondered if people needed to stop eating meat from the marketplaces....

They struggled with how to be “one”.

That struggle is still real – has been for a long time – not just for Jews and Gentiles:

The North and The South....in our Methodist tradition, the church even divided itself.....

Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland

West Berlin and East Berlin

Black and White

Republican and Democrat

Traditionalists and Progressives

Which makes me ask:

Where are we in our spiritual lives together:

Living out "what was"?

What is?

Or what will be?

Remember the long view of God's endgame: to gather up all things in heaven and things on earth; to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,<sup>16</sup> and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

If this is God's endgame....why do struggle with it? Why do we even work against it?

I wonder:

- If we aren't working to be reconciled with each other; to live into "being brought together", how do we truly celebrate the world being reconciled to God?
- If Christ has put to death our hostility – by his own death – are we okay with ongoing hostility?

Fact is: division is easy....reconciliation is tough....because something always has to die (like getting our way).

And if we refuse reconciliation, does that mean we minimize what Christ has done?

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus -

We confess our inability to live together.

We confess the speed with which we become frustrated with and blame others.

We confess the quick ways we cut off relationship with each other.

Forgive us - so that by our living we do not minimize what you have done for us on the cross.

Free us so that we do not raise the very barriers of hostility that you have brought down.

For your kingdom sake we pray. Amen.