

Ephesians 2:13-22

I was surprised... how the text for this morning keeps us in the conversation of our first Forum last week... If you were not there, let me share briefly. The speakers were both professors from Marlboro College in Vermont. Meg, kept reiterating the importance of engaging in discussion around our disagreements, that it is good for a democracy to do so and this can be productive and not divisive. Ahmer, who is Muslim and originally from Pakistan, kept holding up a universal faith perspective of compassion...even and especially for those with whom you may not agree or even like. It was a powerful conversation and I think many of us were asking "But, how, exactly, do we do this?"

Perhaps we have some advice in this letter to the Ephesians written to a very early, just-forming Christian community, when Jews were part of its founding. This letter is talking to the Gentiles, non-Jews who have not yet heard about the message of love, demonstrated by Jesus. Seems to me it is a bridge text .... "Look," says the writer, "we may not believe exactly the same ways, we may have been brought up differently, we may even speak different languages and follow different laws...but we can be one...in the love of Christ." This is powerful!

When I say Christ, I am talking about a universal love embraced by people of other faiths, too. Jesus reached beyond boundaries of differences...those accepted and those not: prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised---this was a big deal back then ...Jesus was ALL about reaching beyond differences in a love *drawn from his relationship with God!*

Look at the way this text begins with division...far off, brought near, two groups, dividing wall, hostility, strangers, aliens....sounds very much like our news....but then saying that in Christ...there can be one new humanity...making peace and reconciling both groups to God.

How might we be partners in this effort of unity and peace...in our times!? Think of the divides in our society today...between, economic class, immigration status, theological/political perspectives....what if you read this scripture putting Republican and Democrat in place of Jews and Gentiles?

Edwin Searcy writes: "We may dream of the day when "our side" is finally triumphant...but the text dreams of another day...In the Spirit of Christ BOTH groups

are already one!" And he goes on to say, "*Church* in the broadest sense, is a synonym for a reconciled community... People who live together *with* their differences and become a dwelling place for God...a household where God chooses to live!"

I want you to imagine for the next part of the service that you are that early Christian church where they did, in fact, gather around tables sharing food and talking about how the teachings of Jesus were impacting their lives.

Here are your questions to explore in conversation:

1. Think of a time when you experienced Christ-love breaking down dividing walls and hostility. Describe it.
2. Is it possible to celebrate differences while also being united in a caring way? Give an example.
3. The writer of this letter to the Ephesians says that Jesus reconciled people "through the cross, putting to death hostility *through* it." What does this mean to you?
4. How is God/Christ a "cornerstone" in your life?
5. How might our church be described as "a reconciled community" where people with differences come together as a "household of God!?"
6. How could the world have access "in one Spirit to God," making us no longer "strangers" but a whole world neighborhood?

After your conversation and meal....we will sing a hymn and close with a benediction....