

I invite you to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 11 - 22. This can be found on page ____ in your pew Bibles. We conclude our series "The Peace Makers" today, our scripture encourages us to focus on the biblical image of the church as God's dwelling place, and to guide us forward to the next steps of personal and corporate peacemaking.

Our Father's Word

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— 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 through the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 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, 16 and in this 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 aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's 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. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

This is the Word of God, for the people of God

When an airline flight has landed, the all too familiar words are heard, “Welcome to your destination, we hope you have a pleasant day! The flight attendant tells us to enjoy our time in the city were we’ve just landed. “We hope you have a pleasant day!”

How about us? What’s our final destination? Have we arrived? Or as your kids might say, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” Our church is on a journey...a journey toward building a culture of peace. And today, in one sense, we come to the end of one journey. It’s the end of our series on being biblical peacemakers. In this series of messages’ we’ve looked at what it means for us *as believers* when our Lord says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”

We’ve looked at Four G’s: those biblical principles that scripture provides to *guide our response* to conflict:

- To Glorify God
- To Get the Log out of our eye
- To Gently Restore our brother or sister in Christ
- To Go and Be Reconciled

We looked at those *good desires* that can grow into *demands* and fuel *conflict*. We looked at the radical nature of God’s forgiveness of us – and in turn, our forgiveness of others and reconciliation to bring peace.

In sum, the Lord has used his Word and the power of his Spirit these seven weeks to begin a powerful work in our midst.

So...where do we go from here? Does our Lord say to us “Welcome to a culture of peace...have a nice day...you’re arrived at your final destination”? The truth is that we haven’t arrived yet...we’re still growing as individuals and as a church. God has blessed us tremendously these last seven weeks through the scriptures, and I’m excited to now look toward the future and see where he’s going to take us as peacemakers.

And so today I want to look to the future God is opening up before us as he builds a culture of peace in our midst. I want to look at that future through the lens of a New Testament book that says more about the church than any book – Ephesians; through the apostle Paul’s letter to the Church in Ephesus. This is the church that Jesus in the 2nd chapter of Revelation calls them out, he says, Rv 2:2-4

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

They have done these great and wonderful things and yet, Jesus says, “You have lost your first love!” So, in this second chapter of Ephesians, Paul begins to tell the Church at Ephesus who they are, and what God has been up to. Who they are in Christ. *In Him*, you have been redeemed. *In Him* you have been united. *In Him*, you have been purchased. *In Him*, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. But the bottom line hits them in verse 11 -22 in the second chapter.

As we read today's scripture, we can form an image of what the church is like. There are several images we might use to describe the church after reading this section of Ephesians.

One that comes to my mind is "community" – the community of Christ that is our church. So let's look at the church through the eyes of the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians 2:11-22.

How many of you *struggle to admit you're lost* when driving? If you're like me, you might drive around a long time before you'd humble yourself, get out of your car, and ask someone for directions. We're reluctant to speak the truth: "I'm lost."

But that's exactly what the apostle Paul says: you were lost. In your own strength, you couldn't find your way to God no matter how hard you tried. So the church is the Community of the Lost.

Look at how Paul begins this section of Ephesians: he reminds us of our past, our condition before Christ. Look at verse 12: he tells the Ephesians to remember that before their conversion, they 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."

Paul tells them to remember their former state. Remember you were separated from Christ; you had no stake in Israel – God's chosen people; you were strangers to the covenant of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants; and, powerfully stated, you were once without hope and without God in the world.

Can you remember that time in your life? Do you remember your former state apart from Christ? Do you remember how far off from God you were prior to Christ? You were separate from him; you weren't at all a part of God's people; you had "no hope and you were without God in the world." Those of you who have trusted Christ in your later teenage years or as an adult probably remember your state before Christ. You remember what it was like...

Or do you? Has it been so long since you trusted Christ that maybe you no longer think about your life before Christ? Paul says to you "Remember where you were before Christ." Remember your lost state before you were united with Christ.

What if you trusted Christ when you were quite young? What if you have no dramatic conversion story to tell of a former life of heinous sin? God says to you, "Think about the life that you were **rescued from** before you ever had to experience sin in all its depths." Even if you were converted at a rather young age, Scripture is clear that you were and are a sinner saved only by God's grace.

Remember that and count it as one more blessing of God that not only did he save you, but he graciously saved you before you had to experience some of the worst effects of sin. Without a doubt, God says that regardless of whether you received Christ at a young age or much later in life, you were without hope and without God in the world.

On the other hand, there may be some of you here today who have never yet trusted Christ, never made him your treasure in life. You may have an interest in God, in Jesus, in what this "Christian thing" might be all about. You may have come to church all your life. You might be searching, wondering, what really is the truth?? What is the Bible saying to you right now?

It's telling you a message you may not want to hear: regardless of how you may feel right now, the Bible says that without Jesus Christ you have no hope and you're without God in this world.

You have no peace with God. And a result you may lack peace with others. But thank God, that's not the end of his message to you. There is yet hope.

Christian, you were lost before Christ. You were alienated. You were without hope and without God in the world. And so, our church is the Community of the Lost.

But, thanks be to God, it doesn't end there. Because...

Paul now goes on to give an amazing contrast. Grace has come. Once you were alienated, lost, estranged, without hope and without God in the world. Verse 13: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."

Through the blood of Christ, that's the key. Why? Why is the blood of Christ necessary? Our sins, our wrong acts and violations of God's law that we knowingly and willingly chose, those sins had separated us from a holy God. But God, in his great mercy, provided a means for us to be acceptable before him: by the death of God's sinless Son on our behalf, the righteousness of Jesus (the purity, the holiness, and perfect obedience of Jesus) have been transferred to us, while Jesus has willingly taken on the punishment for our horrible sins. All that, and so much more, is what Paul means when he says that Gentiles "have been brought near by the blood of Christ." That's the hope we have in Christ. Our hope was purchased by the blood of Christ. Our peace was purchased by the blood of Christ.

The death of Jesus on the cross has brought Gentiles near, and it's brought near every one of you who have trusted Christ...you are no longer separated from Christ, you are now a citizen of Israel, you're a recipient of the promise of the covenant. God's covenant with his people now applies to you – you're one of God's chosen ones.

Paul expands on this idea that Gentiles who were formerly lost have been brought near through the death of Jesus. Look at verses 14-16. In some of the densest, deepest theology in Ephesians, Paul makes his point by making reference to the Temple in Jerusalem. And this is an important point we've got to understand if we're going to understand Paul here: the Jerusalem Temple had a wall dividing the "Court of the Gentiles" from the "Holy Place" with a sign threatening death to any Gentile who transgressed the boundaries.

The Temple of God in Jerusalem – the very place on earth promising "access" to the one true God – was marred by a human dividing wall that symbolized both the wall dividing human beings from one another, and the cosmic wall separating God from humanity.

For humans, it was a vertical dividing wall that showed the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. God's house was not open to outsiders. Isaiah and Jesus said God's house was to be a house of prayer for all peoples. The gracious promises of God to bless all peoples through Abraham (Gen 12) "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" had been perverted – the Temple in Jerusalem had become a symbol of the division that existed between Jews and Gentiles.

But now, says Paul in verse 14, Jesus has become our peace. Eph 2:14-17

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 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*, 16 and in this *one body* to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

He has broken down in himself that very wall that divided Jew and Gentile by abolishing the Law that the Jews had used to serve as a divider between themselves and the Gentiles. You see, God's Law in the Old Testament was his gracious gift to Israel and to the world; sadly, however, many Jews had sinfully used the Law as way to maintain their pride and self-sufficiency – “we Jews keep God's law...we earn God's favor by keeping the Law...” They used the Law as a stick to beat up Gentiles and to actually keep Gentiles away from God.

But Jesus has now, says Paul, abolished the Law so that he might create in himself “one new man”, a new “race” of people, if you will, in place of Jew and Gentile. Thereby Jesus destroys the hostility between Jew and Gentile, by destroying that hostility *on the cross* and creating this new man in one new body, the *body of Christ*. And not only does he reconcile one hostile people group to another, but he reconciles all of us to the God from whom we were estranged and at war because of our sin. “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.” For Christians in conflict, the blood of Christ brings peace with God and with other believers.

Then notice finally in this section, how Paul grounds all this reconciliation among different believers: in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Verse 18:

“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.” Note Paul’s use of “for,” -- “for” gives a reason, it’s like “because.” How can there be reconciliation between radically different groups of believers in Jesus? Because, verse 18, *through Jesus* we both have access in *one Spirit* to the Father.

Our church is the community of the *Redeemed* and the *Reconciled*. We’re reconciled to one another because we’re reconciled first to God. And the ground of that reconciliation with each other is the Spirit of Jesus at work in our own lives.

If your wife or your husband is also a believer, the Holy Spirit that gives you access to the Father gives her or him access, too. If your siblings or your in-laws are believers, the same Holy Spirit is giving them access to the Father too. Or if you are unreconciled to your Christian children, Paul says that the same Holy Spirit is at work in each of you, and you all have been brought near by the peace available through the blood of Christ.

That doesn’t mean that reconciliation is easy – it’s hard work, and can take time and patience. But the ground of reconciliation is always there: Christ has reconciled us to God through his death, and by that perfect life and death has made possible real and genuine reconciliation between brothers and sisters in Christ, because you’re all part of one body – the body of Christ.

The Scripture also tells us that, just as Christ has brought reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, so he can bring reconciliation between different Christians today. Jesus has done it all. He’s the reconciler. He’s the peacemaker. He’s broken down the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. He’s broken down the hostility between races.

If there's still hostility there today between Christians of different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds, it's not because Jesus hasn't done his job – he's broken down the dividing wall.

And the apostle Paul says to us here today that the Holy Spirit is alive and at work in the lives of all believers. He is our peace; he's our peace with our children; with our spouses; with our parents, our siblings, our friends, our co-workers, our brothers and sisters in Christ here today. He's brought peace...he's brought reconciliation. He's bigger than all those issues.

So that's what he calling our church to be: the community of the Redeemed, and the community of the reconciled.

So, how do we do that? It's fine for me to tell you this, but how do we do it?

In one sense, the Lord has already provided you, through his Word and the power of this Spirit, with the tools and the power you need to be a peacemaker. For many of us, the Lord is tugging at our hearts, showing us to whom we need to go and with whom we need to be reconciled. And so, we just need to do it – to go.

So, not only are we the community of the Lost (or should we say formerly Lost?). And not only are we the community of the Redeemed and the Reconciled. Now Paul gives a powerful image of our church: a dwelling place for God.

Our Church: a dwelling place for God.

Paul is ready now to come to his conclusion in this part of Ephesians. He tells these Gentiles in verse 19 “Consequently” – so then, you people who once were far off, who were not part of God’s covenant people, but who have now had the dividing wall of hostility broken down, who have been united in Christ into one new man, who have been reconciled to God in one body through the cross of Jesus...So then, consequently, (verse 19)

“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.”

Paul’s conclusion is that these Gentiles now have a totally new status in Christ. They are no longer like the “strangers and aliens” in the Old Testament, those non-Jews who attached themselves to the people of Israel – but who always had a certain second-class status. No: they are now fellow citizens with God’s people. Note the reversal here of verses 11-12: formerly they were excluded, but now they’re part of God’s chosen people. They are members of God’s household.

And in verse 20 Paul starts to meld one metaphor into another, as he says that God’s people are like stones in a building that has a foundation of Christ’s apostles and prophets, and that has a cornerstone of Christ Jesus himself. You people, says Paul, are being built into a building, but don’t worry – it’s solid.

We can be confident because the foundation of the church is built on the solid foundation of Christ. You know yourselves to be weak, crumbly stones. But the cornerstone, the foundation stone, the thing this whole building stands on, is Jesus Christ.

Verse 21 spells out that this “building” is growing – it’s like a living building – it’s growing to become a holy temple in the Lord. The old Temple had a dividing wall, a sign of hostility. But the new temple is the newly formed people of God themselves.

There’s the temple of God; that’s where God chooses to dwell; there’s where he can be found. Look at verse 22: And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

These Gentiles had been so lost. They had been without God and without hope in the world: strangers and aliens, cut off from the people of God. And now, God says, “Everything has changed. I am building you all into a dwelling place for me by my Spirit.” The Lord is making our church into a dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

The core question of all of this is Who is your cornerstone? Whom are you built upon? And God’s answer is “I’ve provided your cornerstone, your foundation – Jesus Christ himself and his atoning death for you.”

What is God is building us to be? Verse 22: our church is being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. That’s pretty heady stuff, isn’t it? Sometimes life probably seems a lot more mundane than that. But no, says God: as people reconciled to God and then to one another, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives.

Now that's a vision that we as a church body can strive for...we can strive for it because it's God himself who is building us together. Note that Paul doesn't say "You are making yourselves into a dwelling place for God"...

"No," says Paul, "you are being built together," (that is, God himself is building you) "into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." God's Spirit, the Spirit that's alive and active in our individual lives, the Spirit that's alive and active in our homes, the Spirit that's alive and active in our corporate body, is building us into a dwelling place for God. We don't deserve it, we haven't earned it, but God has graciously given it nonetheless.

Ultimately, it's not about us. It's about God dwelling in his people by the Spirit. And we are that people. You are a dwelling place for God, built on the firm foundation of Christ.

our church is the community of the Lost; the community of the Redeemed and the Reconciled; the community built on Christ to be a dwelling place for God.

That sounds like a tall order. More than we might think we could possibly accomplish...a people at peace, a people reconciled to one another, a people who are a holy temple, a people who are a dwelling place for God? But Paul has a word for us there, too.

Later in Ephesians, after his powerful portrait of the church and all that God calls it to be, he prays for the church, and then in 3:20-21 in the benediction to his prayer he says:

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..."

It is a tall order. We can't do it, but He can. He can do immeasurably more abundantly than all that we ask or think – according to His power at work in us. “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen”

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your precious gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus,

Who took upon himself, upon the cross, all the payment required to

Reconcile us back to you Father, bringing us peace with you.

Thank you for breaking down the barrier that separated us from you.

For making us one body in Christ Jesus. For bringing us into your family.

We are so thankful that you have made us your temple,

the dwelling place for your Holy Spirit. In us, in your church.

Grant us your strength as we continue on this journey of life to be peacemakers,

gently restoring peace through reconciliation.

May we give you all the glory, all the praise, all the honor, as we

Go out to share the Gospel to all that we meet.

AMEN