

**No Longer Strangers**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**  
**July 21, 2024**  
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Yesterday I had the joy of marrying a wonderful couple. The groom is Filipino and the bride is Vietnamese. So, we heard three different languages being spoken back and forth as the younger people, who are all fluent in English, translated for several older family members who, although they spoke English, struggled to understand everything perfectly.

As part of their wedding ceremony, we had the scripture read in Vietnamese and English by members of the bride's family. We had the groom's family participate in a Filipino wedding ritual involving a veil and a white rope. It was quite beautiful and symbolic of the joining of two cultures, two families through the union of this lovely couple.

We can all name couples that come from very different backgrounds who get married. Sometimes they come from cultures that historically have been at war with each other or feuding families that vow endless animosity. Maybe the person married someone of a different religion. There are countless plays and movies built around this image of two lovesick youths who fall in love despite the enmity between their cultures or families. We celebrate when we see love overcome hate. Even better when we see the couple triumph over adversity and bring peace.

This to me is a loose expression of what we hear in our passage from Ephesians today. Paul is writing to remind the church in Ephesus that they are two, formally alienated peoples, who are being made into a new community in Christ. Paul acknowledges the tensions and the competing loyalties that each is being influenced by. He mentions the dehumanizing language used to fuel animosity. In the beginning of

this passage, we hear some of these dehumanizing words. Terms like gentile, uncircumcised or circumcised, alien to Israel, strangers to the covenant.

These are all terms used to maintain the hostilities and distance between the two groups. These words are used to fuel prejudices and the rejection of others. They communicate an expression of superiority over another, a hierarchy of rights attempting to create a second class.

Such language is used to indoctrinate people and create a psychological justification for harming or killing another human being. When we see others as a dog, a monster, vermin, rats, aliens, or criminals, one can feel justified in mistreating them, even killing them.

Still today we hear this kind of rhetoric happening around us and we need to pay particular attention to such language regardless if it is used for political, racial or religious gain. As Christians we need to decry such derogatory and inflammatory words and call them what they are – Hate Speech.

Why? Because Paul says here, “so that Christ might create in himself one new humanity.” The New Testament is full of this kind of language: A new humanity! A new Creation, A new People, A New Jerusalem, A new World! THIS IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE GOSPEL – THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST.

Paul is writing to the Ephesians to address these tensions within the church because people are holding onto these past allegiances and understanding of themselves, failing to fully embrace the work of the cross to bring reconciliation to the world through Jesus.

So whether we are dealing with factions within the church, within the greater community or in the world, we can see Paul lay out several steps to bring about this new community, this new humanity.

First Paul calls out biased language. He uses their argument against them. “You boast in your physical circumcision, well a greater circumcision is the circumcision of the heart. It was Christ who was cut for us, he is our circumcision, not the inferior circumcision made by human hands.”

It is all about what God has done through Christ. Jesus’ death has declared peace for all of humanity. He has brought all near, he has torn down the curtain that separates us and he has abolished the law. So anything you boast about that makes you feel superior to another has been made null and void. God has declared a ceasefire.

Why you may ask? Here is Paul’s answer “Jesus came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

Beyond the ceasefire we must also seek reconciliation. Paul goes on to say that we are all citizens. Citizens of the kingdom of God! We need to remember we are all on the same team, one nation, one people, one humanity founded by Christ and no other. This is the beginning of peace, but we also need to be reconciled. Not just to God but to one another. We need to renounce our past allegiances and embrace our citizenship in God’s kingdom.

We also need to make restitution. Reconciliation is a confession of our sins. It is admitting wrong, making restitution, amends, and reparations. Finally, it is letting go of that past animosity and moving on with peaceful co-existence, seeing ourselves as one body, one faith, one community of God. Peace first and foremost with God, but also peace with one another.

So whether you are looking to bring healing and forgiveness to a personal conflict or you are seeking to end a war half way around the world the steps are the same.

First you must see one another as fully human and equal to you. They have just as much right to live and pursue happiness as any other person. We all have certain inalienable human rights. We all have intrinsic value in the eyes of God.

Secondly, we need to stop hostilities. We need to call a ceasefire. Stop attacking one another with words, laws and violence in all its forms. These are systems of prejudice we use to control, dominate or alienate another group or people. Conversely, we need to stop justifying our own privilege and gain over them. The color of our skin, our ethnic identity, gender, and not even our religious or political identity should be grounds to treating another child of God any less or used to justify us gaining an advantage at their expense.

Lastly, we need to confess our sins and make restitution. We need confess the ways we have supported such violence. We need to admit the wrongs of the past and see how we have been manipulated to hate others. How even the Gospel of Peace has been usurped to justify hatred

Paul reminds us in this letter that God seeks a people, a holy dwelling place a temple. Not in a building, but within our hearts.

We are no longer strangers, but intimate partners in the divine calling of Christ, the Prince of Peace and OUR PEACE.