

**20/8/08 Ephesians 2:11-3:13 midweek Ephesians 2b (mid)**

I want to show you something this evening that is one of my most treasured possessions. But before I tell you why it is so special, I want you to guess what it is. So has anyone got any idea what it is and where this might have come from?

So this rock, this lump of concrete is special to me, because it came from the Berlin Wall. And for some 40 years the Berlin Wall was a symbol for most of us of the Cold War. A division between America and the Soviet Union, the west and the east, between democracy and communism, between repression and freedom.

But in 1989, the wall came tumbling down. In a matter of weeks, communism crumbled across Eastern Europe. And the barrier set up that divided the German people, that divided families, that divided the world was decisively knocked down. And when I went backpacking around Europe just 6 months later, I went to Berlin. I saw where the Wall once was. I climbed the bits of rubble, I saw the difference that it made to people on both sides and I witnessed the possibility of unity and unification that comes when the walls comes tumbling down.

What a historic moment. But as I read Ephesians 2, I realise that although that day in 1989 was important, it was no where near as important as the day that Jesus death broke down an even bigger wall.

You see Paul, in v 11, paints the picture of the wall, the division, the alienation between the Jew and the Gentile, between Jew and non-Jew. So what caused this division?

Well we see in verse 11, the Jews had the symbol of circumcision and labelled the Gentiles “uncircumcised”. The Jews in verse 12 had God’s covenant, his promises, they had hope in this world for they had access to God. But the Gentiles were excluded from the Jewish nation, they became foreigners to the covenant, outside of the realm of promise and hope and thus were without God.

Now that seems unfair, doesn’t it? And it was! But it wasn’t what God’s plan was. God’s plan was to choose a nation, the nation Israel, **to give them** his *covenant*, his *promise*, his presence, his *hope* and they were then to **share** these things with the nations around them. They were meant to be a city on the hill, where God’s light would be able to shine all around them. And this in turn would attract those who were seeking God from every nation in the world.

But instead of sharing the things that God had given them, the Jews kept them to themselves. Instead of reaching out to the nations, they built walls around the nation. Instead of being a light to the nations, they kept them in darkness. And the symbol of how far wrong the Jews had got it all was a wall that they built in the Temple.

Paul refers to it in verse 14 as the dividing wall of hostility. It was a wall of some 4 foot high that separated the Court of the Jews from the Court of the Gentiles. And it kept all non-Jews far away from the holy of holies, the place of God's presence, far away from the sacrifices, that pointed to the availability of forgiveness, and far away from the Jews, as the people of God.

This wall was a powerful symbol - like the Berlin Wall, like the iron curtain. And on the wall, just in case any Gentile was thinking about going over the wall was these words. *"Trespassers will be executed."* *"Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy Place. Whoever is caught doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue."*

Pretty extreme isn't it? But it got worse. Remember that when Jesus came into the Temple he drove out the cattle that were being sold there and overturned the money changers tables. Why? Because they were in the court of the Gentiles! So not only was there this dividing wall but the Jews were conducting business within the Gentile's area, making it even harder to worship God or to learn about his greatness.

Now the Gentiles still had God's revelation about his greatness and his uniqueness through his creation, but the book of Romans reminds us that even though God's power is plainly seen through nature, humans on the whole have suppressed this truth, turned their backs on it. So without an understanding of God from nature, or revelation via the Jews, these Gentiles, these non-Jews were without hope. In fact, Archaeologist have examined many 1st century cemeteries in Greece and Rome and found many tombs with the inscription upon them, 'NO HOPE'.

Now why am I going on about this? Because I am a Gentile. And my guess is that 95% of us here are also Gentiles as well. And last week we were told that by nature we are dead and enslaved and condemned. So that means if God did nothing about this, I'd be in big, big trouble. And so would you too.

We are far away from God and we are alienated from others. Because this division between Jew and Gentile, is not the only division amongst us human beings. We are also divided men vs women. Slave against free. Black against white. Rich vs Poor. For the division between Jew and Gentile is just the most obvious of many divisions we live under. For when we are alienated from God & don't follow his promises and covenants, we are also alienated from each other. We fight, we argue, we steal, we are jealous & there is no solution in sight

So what's the solution? Better education? More government funding? Escape to the past? Is it just getting on with life and doing the best we

can? I read recently about a project called "Cyclops" that some brilliant scientists have devoted themselves to. It involves the expenditure of large sums of money in an effort to explore the universe with telescopes and other means, to see if they can discover a higher level of civilization than we know here, with the hope, that they might strike upon a civilization which has solved some of the problems we wrestle with right now, and they might help us find a solution to our problems.

**2. After** Fortunately God has a better plan. A way of turning alienation into reconciliation and hostility into peace. And surprise, surprise its through his son Jesus. As (Eph 2:13) says *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”*

Jesus is the one who brings the two together to make one. He is the one who ends our hostility. He is the one who ensures there are no aliens and foreigners any more. Instead we become fellow citizens, fellow house mates, together part of God’s holy Temple, together we are the place where God dwells.

So how does he do this? Does he change his plan? Does he go on to plan b, or c or z? Does he just destroy everything he has done and start from scratch? No. He works through his original plan by ensuring that his Son Jesus fulfils it perfectly!

So **God still gives the Jew his covenant, his promises, his hope.** But this time he gives it to a Jew who will represent all his fellow Jews, a Jew **called Jesus**. This Jesus dies on the cross for the **Jew’s** sins. He enables the Jew to be forgiven, raised up, made alive, seated with Christ, as we saw last week. Thus the Jew is no longer alienated from God, he has been brought near.

But the thing about Jesus is that he doesn’t just do this for the Jew only, he does it for the whole world, the Jew and **the Gentile**. He forgives them as well. He includes them in the covenant, in God’s promises, he gives them hope as well. He draws them near to God. And instead of the dividing wall of hostility, instead of the division between the two, instead of the hatred and enmity and the exclusiveness of the past, they become **one people**.

They are drawn near to God and to each other. They have peace with God and can have peace with each other. For together they become heirs of the promises of God. The two become one. So how does God do this? In verse 18, he says *“for through Jesus we both have access to the Father by the one Spirit.”* It is God’s Spirit that brings us together. So unity comes though having a common spirit, God’s Spirit.

But it also comes through ensuring that we both have our lives on the

same foundations. The foundation of the prophets of the *OT* and the apostles of the *NT*. That is unity comes when all trust in God's word, his revealed truth and seek to base our lives on that and that alone.

And lastly unity comes through the *preaching* of God's grace. For in chapter 3 Paul goes on to say that God's plan is not to be kept quiet, but it is to be made known to all. And that the role of the Church is not to build up walls around itself, to retreat into a holy huddle, it is to preach, to share God's wonderful wisdom and as we have the same aim and the same purpose, this too will draw us together.

Now this has been implications for today's world. For it is saying that the things that divide us can be resolved. The things that bring hostility can be turned into peace. But only when both sides seek to go through Jesus. When they trust in the work of God's word and his spirit. And when the gospel of grace is at the heart of one's faith and one's outreach.

But if these conditions are not met, there will always be fighting. Nation will rise up against nation. People group will fail to forgive people group. Suicide bombers will attack and tanks will retaliate. It is only in Jesus that real, lasting reconciliation possible. So one of the best things we can do in the disputes throughout our world, is to encourage both sides to look to God's plan, his purpose, his grace, to see the cross of Christ as the way forward. And without that, there will always be alienation and division.

This may sound pie in the sky but the best hope of turning hostility into peace and alienation into reconciliation is through Jesus. And until we realise that, our world will never grasp the peace that God offers them through the cross of Christ.

But if these words are appropriate for our world, they are even more appropriate for our Church. For the Church of Christ is divided where ever we look. And the question more and more Christians are asking is how can we become one? And the answer is not necessarily seeking to have one denomination, because there are far too many differences, both cultural and theological to achieve that.

The unity we should be seeking for is one where we enjoy God's presence of his holy Spirit together, in working things together with God's Word open and all of us have a commitment to both living by grace and preaching this grace together. Unity on any other basis will fail. Unity in just forgetting our differences will fail. Unity must come through Jesus and only through Jesus. Pursing it on any other basis will ultimately fail

**3. Today.** So where does that leave us *today*? In some ways this passage has been heavy going. Its been hard to work out how it applies to us in our modern world, where the division between Jew

and Gentile doesn't seem a great one, unless of course you happen to live on the West Bank. So what would Paul say to us tonight here at Terranora in 2008?

Well he would point out that often we can be divided over a whole range of things. **We** are divided in our *families*. Husband fights with wife. Parents with children. Brother with sister. What we are seeing today is that we build up our walls of hostility and try and keep out other members of our family. And in the Church we are often divided over issues with other people in our Church family.

But if Jesus has brought Jews and Gentiles together by the cross, he also provides a way to bring family members together as well. So we as Christians should seek a way to reconcile with each other as a family. We don't hold onto our grudges, we seek to forgive as Jesus forgave. We don't say they treated me badly so I'll give them back what they have given me, we seek to apply the gospel of grace. And we won't find unity in any man made theories or philosophies, but only as we both seek to apply God's word in our lives.

Similarly we are often divided over *wealth*. We hang around people of a similar economic background. We gossip over someone else's BMW or we look down on those who can only afford to get their clothes from Vinnies. Or we separate over *race*. They look different to me, so I'll stick with my own kind. We decide as a country to treat people differently because they are *refugees*, or because they have a different sexual orientation, or a mental problem, or religious background we treated them differently.

But friends Jesus is able to reconcile all differing people. The Church should be the melting pot for all different types of people, different backgrounds, different looks, different interests, different status. For if God has accepted them as one of his own, so should we. If God has forgiven them so should we.

As John Stott says "*I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel than that the Church be and be seen to be, what God's purpose is - a single new humanity, a model of Christian community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other. Only then will the world believe in Christ as peacemaker and give him the glory due to his name*" p. 111

We should work hard on breaking down the barriers that divided us Christians and start working hard at being peacemakers and being unified for a watching world to see. Is that what this Church is about? Being willing to not slag off the Pentecostals, the Baptists, the Uniting Church. For if we can agree over Jesus, they are our brothers and sisters. We can work with them on SRE. We can not try and sheep steal their people. We can find a way where we can witness together,

to show a watching world that we are one.

Let me give you one simple example of that happening recently. At BPHS, the local churches have employed an SRE teacher and about two months ago, he organised for a number of Churches to come together to provide morning tea for the staff. Real coffee. Yummy cakes. For nix, nothing. To say thank you for the hard work that the teachers put in under difficult situations. The result? Amazement. One that the Churches would bother. Two that they would care. Three that they would work together.

And we shouldn't be divided over age with the older people afraid of the newer music and the younger people rolling their eyes over the older hymns. We shouldn't be divided over race, but as the nations flock to Australia, we should seek them out, and try and help them to find a home amongst us.

That's the challenge - not to find ways of being divided, but working hard at unity, at love, at accepting those who outwardly are different to us. And if we were to do that we would lead our world, we would show them that God brings unity even amongst those who are divided. And then we would be a light, a light to the nations and they would want to know our secret and we would point them to Jesus.

The question is what are we going to do, as individuals and a Church to break down the walls of hostility and to be unified around Jesus? If we do nothing, the division remain. If we work together, the walls may come tumbling down.