

**Sermon for Sunday 18th July 2021,  
by Eunice Forsyth, Ordinand at Ridley Hall  
Ephesians 2:11-end and Mark 6:30-34, 53 – end**

The feelings of wanting and watching the England team in the final of Euro 2020. We are coming home! the spirit of England was flying! The people cheering and waving flags, happy faces, there is always joy in sport, in whatever form it takes, as it is the expression of solidarity, The cheers are deafening, and there is apprehension about whether England will win! Imagine celebrating oneness in Christ in that way.

Paul the author of Ephesians writes in the first verses of chapter one, “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before in love”, (Eph.1:3-4).

Do we see ourselves as “one in Christ”, are we a team? There are times where we may not feel the oneness of Christ as we attend church or even as we interact throughout our local community.

In my experience of attending different churches, I have observed and interacted with many people who do not feel included, ignored, and explained about being disregarded.

In my mum’s generation the Caribbean and other commonwealth citizens coming to the UK felt like that. Feeling the stranger/alien to God’s household, his Church. They are a believer of Christ, but felt excluded and separated, strangers, no hope without God. However, they continued to attend church and love God.

Some churchgoers feel excluded because they believe they are unable to attend church because their children will make a

disturbance, or for the reason that they must dress appropriately, or unable to contribute to the church, maybe they are unable to read or articulate themselves, or because they are not a part of the social group, possibly feeling like a stranger at their local church. It is not just in church that this take place but in the community itself. People may feel, no hope, like strangers, without God due to their culture, sexual orientation, political parties or not part of a team.

Do we ever feel like this or know someone who feels like they do not belong? The church should be a big family with all kinds of people, “we are one” is the key to the letter of Ephesians. This is Jesus’ mission who wants us to be in union with one another, combined in humanity reconciled and transformed to break down the obstacles that prevents peace.

In terms of the promise with God, the Gentiles were seen as outsiders the Jews were seen as insiders. Kyle Fever, 2021 who comments on sermons says, “the perspective of Gentile life and religious beliefs because the Jews, as defined by their history and tradition, were equally ignorant of God.” This meant, both circumcised and uncircumcised groups did not socialise together, even to the point of not sitting at the same table. They had no desire to share their lives together.

Going back to the reading, Gentiles by birth are called “the uncircumcision”, non-Jewish, without Christ, aliens from the “commonwealth of Israel” is the English translation in Greek πολιτείας ( politeias) mentioned in Ephesians 2 :12, says, the Gentiles were isolated from the covenants promise, the covenant family of Abraham, there is no hope and without God in the world. As Christians we should think about how we people who are outsiders feel today, the dispossessed, the homeless.

The context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is about reconciliation, forgiveness, and grace. For Christ Jesus, who was far away from the Gentiles, has been brought close by Christ's blood.

What Christ did was to break the spell by the “blood of Christ” in v13. In Ephesians 2:11-13, “by his flesh is has made both groups, Gentiles and Jews, who are “the circumcision” – “a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands, remember a time without Christ”, who have historically been God's heritage and the object of God's promises.

Through Christ he is our peace who has crushed the “dividing wall of hostility,” sacrificing his body, and the laws of the Torah have been fulfilled, when Christ came on earth and the wall is removed.

Thus, we must see God who loves unconditionally, loves to create in himself as Paul calls it “one new humanity” in which Jews and Gentiles would live together in peace, in Christ. This was the purpose to be one body to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles to unite to God through the cross, by Christ’s death, hostility is no more.

As Christ broke the dividing walls, it is our duty to go out into the community and break the barriers that have been put up. If we look at society today, there are lots of things that divide us, the politics of division.

Through Christ Jesus, he came to teach us about unity and peace, “to those who were far off and to those who were near” and throughout his teaching we would have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, “you are no longer strangers or aliens or foreigners, but citizens of God’s people and members of God’s

household like the foundations of the disciples with Christ Jesus himself as the head of the Church, the chief cornerstone”.

In this world today, we do need peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness more than ever as we live in a different world, as we emerge out of lockdown. Peace with our family, friends, and neighbour. Let us not be the barrier who prevents, peace with God. Help us to spiritually dwell in the house of God through faith and to build together and as Paul says the structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God”

Strengthen us Lord God and equip us to be ambassadors of God’s kingdom and to be part of this one new humanity, Paul talks about. You never, know we could be united together shouting, singing, and praising God, for the oneness in Christ, calling for the power of God’s spirit to dwell in our hearts through faith. Amen