

9 S. after Pentecost 7/21/24
Ephesians 2:11-22 11B

“BUT NOW IN CHRIST JESUS YOU WHO ONCE WERE FAR OFF HAVE BEEN BROUGHT NEAR BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST”

On Christmas Eve, 1914, one of the most storied and strange moments took place in the history of war.

The British soldiers, shivering with cold in the mud and muck of their trenches, heard singing coming from the German trenches. They instantly recognized “Silent Night.” It was Christmas, after all, so they began to sing back. A shout in English was heard with a strong German accent, “Come over here.” One of the British sergeants answered, “You come half-way. I come half-way.”

What happened next stunned the world and made history – the Christmas Truce. Enemies began to climb out of their trenches and they met in the No Man’s Land that separated them. They joined in a spontaneous Christmas party, trading tobacco and wine. Photos were taken. An impromptu game of soccer was played. One British soldier even set up a makeshift barber shop and charged the Germans a few cigarettes each for a haircut.

The Christmas Truce helps us understand our Epistle lesson this morning – how enemies can be reconciled. Paul writes,

...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

God created us to be one with Him and one with each other, but sin divides. Sin separated us from God and from one another.

Look at the examples throughout the Bible. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But, they sinned and hid from God. They were cast out of Eden, separated from God.

In his anger and jealousy, Cain killed his brother Abel, forever separating himself from his brother.

Noah and his family stood out as righteous in an unrighteous world. Even though Noah faithfully preached repentance, all others refused to believe that God's judgment would ever come. But the flood did come, forever separating the believers inside the ark and the unbelievers outside.

All the people of the world shared a common language. In their pride and arrogance, they decided to build a tower to make a name for themselves, rather than bearing the name of God. For their wickedness, God confused their language. People could not understand one another and "Babel," "confusion" resulted. They drifted apart from one another into different tribes, cultures, and nations and history chronicles the distrust, prejudice, and violence that the division sin has brought.

If we want to see the separation sin brings, we don't need to look at Scripture, we only need to look at the world and our lives in it. Our work places – instead of being places where all work together for the common good – are more often places of envy and power plays, gossip and back stabbing, all to get ahead. Families – the most sacred of institutions God has given for strength and comfort – are often where we see the greatest, most emotional of conflict. The only words children hear from their parents are "Can't you do anything right?!" And parents hear, "I hate you," from their own children. When words of hate are not filling the air, deadly silence fills our homes.

Sin divides; it isolates us from God and from one another. It ends friendships, destroys marriages, estranges families, and hurts congregations. Ultimately, it works to single sinners out into the grave and hell, separating them forever from God. That, Dear Friends in Christ, is the greatest isolation of all.

II. Like those British soldiers hearing the Germans singing on that Christmas Eve so many years ago, we have heard God's Christmas hymn, sung by the angel chorus, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **PEACE** among those with whom he is pleased (Lk 2:14)!*"

St. Paul says it this way in our reading today, *Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ ... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (12, 13)*. In the words of that wondrous Christmas hymn, "God and sinner reconciled!

What the Apostle says is true of you: once you were separated from Christ. You were born sinful and separated – divided – from God. You had no hope. Because of your sin, you were destined to be separated from God in hell for eternity.

But, God is love, and that love meant that He did not want us separated from Him and from one another, and so He sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus, to reconcile us to Himself and to one another. The Son of Man became man and dwelt among us. As God and man, He bore your sin and the sin of all the world to the cross. His blood was shed so that you would be forgiven. He suffered God's condemnation so that you would be spared that condemnation. He was abandoned by God so that you would never be abandoned. He died, so that you would not die. And, the 3rd day, He rose again, to give you His life.

Notice what Jesus does in our Gospel life – He gives life. The Savior has compassion on the crowd *because they were like sheep without a shepherd*, and fed them their daily bread. Jesus has compassion on us, Dear Friends. He gives you your daily bread and He has clothed you with Himself in your Baptism, and continues to forgive you and renew you in His righteousness by His Word and His Supper.

Today, Christ has had compassion and put His name on Brieyn. She lives in Jesus and Jesus lives in her, today and for all eternity. And, what is true of Brieyn is true of you, for you have been baptized and live in Jesus, today and forever. This, Dear Saints, is true unity, in which there is no division.

But be aware, the unholy three of the devil, the world, and the weakness and doubts of your sinful flesh will try with all their might, with their flatteries and seductions, to separate you from God, keep you broken in pieces, and captive to death and the grave. But, you have the hope of the Easter resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can gladly say that you are God's own child.

As you journey upon life's way, Jesus still has compassion on you. Your Good Shepherd journeys with us and gives us promises, provisions, strength, hope for our journey, and joy in our journey. *His rod and His staff, they comfort me*, we know from the blessed Shepherd Psalm. Jesus has compassion on us, He comforts us, He does His work in us, through the hearing and learning of His Word and eating and drinking of His life-giving Body and Blood – to give us all these things for our journey to heaven.

What does this mean for our life together? It means that far from allowing sin to divide us, we work to be reconciled to one another. We are Christ to one another. To harbor hatred and anger is to deny the Gospel.

Should you harbor hatred or anger against someone because of their race, because they have more money or a bigger house than you, because they got the promotion at work you believed to be yours, because they have sinned against you and hurt you badly – **REPENT**. Repent, and believe and live that you are Christ to your neighbor – even the ones with all the thorns.

Remember, once you were lost and condemned in sin. But, now, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ and you are forgiven in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.