

Ephesians 2:14, 17-22 - 3rd after Pentecost [2nd a. Trin] 5.6.2016

Through Jesus Christ - part of God's family

¹⁴ For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us.

¹⁷ He has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and to us Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. [NLT]

According to news reports, the USA has issued a warning for travel to South Africa: Shopping malls - especially the upmarket one's - are to be targeted for terror attacks during Ramadan. We have heard such warnings before - but not for South Africa yet.

Terror on the basis of religion - that is not new in our world either. Many wars have been fought because of different religious views - as we see today, it is not only against non-Muslims that terror attacks are planned by Muslim fundamentalists. They readily kill those who belong to a different branch of Islam, and it hardly seems to affect us any more to hear of 15 people being killed in Iraq or Pakistan or Afghanistan or in the Sudan.

Killing people of the same faith - Christians have been innocent in this regard. The long running feud in Northern Ireland is - at least nominally - between Protestants and Catholics. And just after the Reformation such wars tore Europe apart as Protestants and Catholics battled to gain the ascendancy. One wonders how much of the fighting was due to religious reasons, or were the combatants simply using religion as an excuse to make war.

Separations and splits in Christendom are unfortunately a part of the landscape we have grown accustomed to in our time, with 'new' churches springing up all over. It is almost as if there is a command in the Bible to start ever new confessions and communities, rather than the prayer for unity of our Lord, and

the repeated calls by Paul to be bound together by the bond of love.

The message of this passage is very clear: there is just one people of God, for

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In a world split by the differences we make between ourselves, we are reminded of the fact that through Jesus Christ there is no difference any more between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews saw themselves as having a special place with God, due to their long history of being his people, and they believed that they were somehow superior to the Gentiles - who had been 'far away from God'.

This is also a part of the amazing news of the Gospel: **Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us.**

We do not need to make peace, but to accept the peace Christ has made. It is not up to us and our efforts to be tolerant - Christ has brought his **Good News of peace** to us. This peace has its origins in the peace Christ made between God and us - from Christmas to Easter and then on to Pentecost we heard once again all the things Christ did to achieve this peace.

Peace is a gift - if you like the parting gift of our Lord, when he said, "**I am leaving you with a gift - peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.**" (John 14:27)

Our place at God's side is assured, because we have peace with him. So, we do not have to do anything more to ensure our place at God's side - there is no need to prove that we have somehow earned God's approval in a special way, and so have a more special place at his side.

God has done something quite amazing. Even though you may feel lonely and that you are not really part of any group - don't just rely on your feelings! Feelings can be notoriously unreliable - so often they just don't tell the truth. The truth is: **now you ... are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.** The truth is that you have been

made a **fellow citizen** with all of God's holy people - at your Baptism this new citizenship was given to you. Now it no longer matters what human tribe you belong to - through Christ we now belong to the people of God throughout the centuries.

Not only are we fellow citizens with all of **God's holy people. You are members of God's family.** As you may be aware we became part of a family without doing anything ourselves - we did not stand in a special queue to be who we are, and part of the family we are in. Our birth marks the start of being part of our family and all it stands for. The same is true for being part of the family of God - nobody is there because of the history of his family, and all they may have done. We are part of God's family because of what he has done.

In Baptism God made a new start with us as he said to each one of us: I am your Father, you are my child! This marked the start of our life in the family of God and is something nobody can take from you. It does not depend on being able to produce the necessary documentation, or waiting for Home Affairs to process your status. Since the date of your Baptism you have the assurance: I belong to God's family.

From our point of view that may sometimes look a bit shaky - so often we do not live as children of God. [That has caused many to doubt whether their Baptism really was effective. Must they not be re-baptised if they had lived a life apart from God, and then at a later stage returned to him?] How good to know that God remains our Father - even if we have at times been far from him. Like the father in Jesus' parable of the two sons, he waits for the return of his wandering children - and, if we are to be saved, we do need to return to him. But we do not need to be 'reborn' once more.

Part of God's family - and built together to be his church. Church buildings as we know them traditionally, have always been easy to spot - their architecture has been very different and has set them apart from their surroundings. So too we, the Church of Christ, are to be set apart from all other groupings of people. When people see us, they are to recognise that we belong to the church - that we are the church of our Lord. As church we must be easy

to spot - it must be visible to all that God's presence is with us.

This is not always easy - especially when we are made to feel that we are being intolerant when we hold to views which are not popular in our world. That is why we need to remain firmly on the foundation which has been set: the teachings of the apostles and prophets need to be the basis on which we stand.

We lose our impact and distinctiveness when the thinking of our times determines what we say and teach! The message of the Bible has to be translated so that it can be understood by the people of our time, but it can't be adapted to the world we live in, it can't be made to fit into what we would like it to say. That is no help to us, and no help to those who are being lost in their sinfulness.

Jesus Christ needs to be the cornerstone of our life: His life, his death and his resurrection hold the entire structure of the church together. He needs to be at the heart of what we teach and how we live. It is his church into which we have been built as a living stone. We have been called to live and to be a part of this church in which God lives and comes to our world.

Being part of God's family, his church is something we may treasure, but it is also a challenge to us. We are members of a family, joined together by bonds of blood - the blood of our Lord. We are not a rainbow nation, although there are people of all cultures, languages and races in the church. But through our new birth we have become a family - we are built into one church of the one Lord.

We do not need to fight to make a special place for ourselves in the church. God has called us - and he has given us a special place. It is a place no better, and no worse than any other in his kingdom. As his people - his family - we are saved by him, and loved by him.

God has called us out of our separation: Will you be part of his people? Will you be a member of his family. Will you be his church? Our call is a call to receive God's peace - and to be a people of peace in a world torn apart by strife and hatred.