

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, March 29, 2009

Radical Renovation (*Week 5 of 7*)

Reconciliation: Jesus is the Door to God and Each Other

Ephesians 2:13-14, 19-21

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

John 10:9

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Word from the Bible, New International Version

Christ Our Peace, Opening the Door of Separation - Ephesians 2:13-18

Verse 13 opens with the words ***"But now..."*** indicating to the reader that salvation for all people is now a present reality in Jesus Christ. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God's atonement has been extended beyond the Jews to all nations. Jesus has opened the door to God for everyone (see Colossians 1:20-23). In Judaism the terms "far" and "near" were used in reference to insiders and outsiders to the faith. But Paul seems to be speaking geographically using the word from Isaiah 57:19, ***"Peace, peace to the far and near, says the Lord; and I will heal them."*** In verse 14 he identifies Christ as our peace, who has made us, Jew and Gentile, both one in the church.

Moreover, Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. Some commentators believe the metaphor refers to the wall which was erected in the Jerusalem temple to separate the Jewish and Gentile areas. This interpretation does not take into account that Paul is writing to a Greek audience who would be unaware of the traditions of the temple. Instead, Paul is probably speaking of the separation between God and all humanity because of sin. It is this separation that Christ has come to bridge.

In any case, the author says that reconciliation with God means reconciliation with others. Because we are recipients of the saving grace of God in Christ, we should live by grace with those around us. Christ has opened the door to God and in so doing has opened the doors so often closed in relationships. Being a follower of Christ does not erase the differences among people. However — and this is more important — for those in Christ, such differences no longer alienate them from one another.

The Church – A Dwelling Place for God Ephesians 2:19-22

Paul is establishing that those outside the Jewish faith are no longer alienated from God's chosen (verse 12). Not only through faith in Christ are we considered part of God's elect, but are now fellow citizens with the saints.

A second metaphor describes the church as a building founded on the apostles and prophets. For Paul, the apostles and prophets are the recipients of God's revelation and official bearers of the Christian tradition. This is not the first time

Paul has used the building metaphor. In I Corinthians 3:10-15, he speaks of church as building on Christ as the foundation.

In verse 20, he expands the work of Christ by describing him as the **cornerstone, foundation stone** or **capstone** (depending on the translation of the Greek). “Cornerstone” or “foundation stone” would refer to the stone situated at the corner of a foundation from which the builders take their bearings for all the other walls. Thus Christ would be presented as the one who by his presence defines the shape and scope of the church, points it in the way it is to go, and enables its sturdy construction.

A “capstone” on the other hand, is the topmost stone of a wall, the last to be put in place. If this is what the author has in mind, then Christ is described as both effecting and symbolizing the completion and wholeness of the church, the crowning elements under which the structure is united and made strong.

This latter interpretation accords with the metaphor of Christ as head of the church. The former is more in keeping with the immediate context, which speaks of the church’s foundation and of its continuing construction.

Whichever interpretation is followed, Christ is here regarded as the one in whom the whole structure is joined together. Moreover the church is conceived, not as a static mass, but as dynamic and living. The building grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The church is to be constantly growing and maturing in Christ. In verse 22, Paul says, “and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Believers are together being constantly built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. The one Spirit through whom the believer has access to God (verse 18) is thus resident in the church, the all-inclusive body of Christ, the place where God is praised.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Use these questions at home with your family or as a means to reflect on today’s worship.

1. What are some of the dividing walls that you have experienced in your life? Who was on the other side? How was the wall constructed? Who built it?
2. Reread Ephesians 2:11-16. What difference does the death of Jesus on the cross make in the way you relate to other people?
3. How have you been “brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13)? What does it mean for you to say that Jesus has “made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14)? Where have you seen Christ creating a “new humanity” through the blood of the cross (Ephesians 2:15)?
4. Reread Ephesians 2:19-22. What would need to change for Trietsch to fulfill the Apostle Paul’s vision?

Notes

Daily Readings

Please note: We began 2009 by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. We have come now to the resurrection of Jesus. Instead of continuing in Mark's gospel, we are going to shift to the crucifixion and death passages in the other gospels to prepare us for Holy Week. This week we focus on Luke's account of the crucifixion and death of Jesus and then turn to John for Holy Week. Following Easter we will focus for four weeks on the resurrection of Jesus. Beginning in May, we will read through the book of Acts.

Monday, March 30 – Read Luke 22:1-38. Luke includes more details of the arrest, trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus than any of the other gospels. It is believed that Luke was a traveling companion of Peter and therefore records the eyewitness account of the disciple Peter. Luke begins these sections by bracketing the Lord's Supper with the plot to kill Jesus, including the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, and the denial of Peter being foretold. Luke wants us to know that Jesus' offering of himself as illustrated in the Lord's Supper is laced with treachery, betrayal and fear. Jesus stands alone as the sacrifice for us. As you read this account of Luke, to which character do you most relate?

Tuesday, March 31 – Read Luke 22:39-71. Luke tells us it was Jesus' tradition to go to Gethsemane to pray. Prayer was a vital part of Jesus' life and ministry. When the authorities come to arrest Jesus, he is the peace-maker, keeping the event from becoming a riot. From this moment on, the disciples hide for fear they will lose their lives. Following Jesus always involves risk. What are you risking to follow Jesus? Are you comfortable or agitated in your faith?

Wednesday, April 1 – Read Luke 23:1-25. Luke shares with us the details of Jesus' trial and the attempts of the Jewish High Council to get Jesus executed. None of the Roman authorities want the blood of Jesus on their hands. They all try to "pass the buck." When was the last time you tried to avoid the truth of Christ?

Thursday, April 2 – Read Luke 23:26-43. The death of Jesus was a cosmic event, indicated by the sun's darkness at midday. As the universe is shaken, we almost miss the confession of the thief next to Jesus. He says, "**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**" These words alone are enough for Jesus to say, "**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**" How many times have you ask Jesus just to remember you?

Friday, April 3 – Read Luke 23:44-56. In telling the story of Jesus' burial, Luke wants us to know that at least one member of the High Council, Joseph of Arimathea, did not agree the decision to execute Jesus. When was the last time that you stood alone among your peers as a witness for Christ?