

Ephesians 2:13-22

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Proper 15 A

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Created to be One

Out of everything that could have done it, a basketball game gave me what I was looking for. A few months into my time in East Asia, I was feeling the differences between me and everyone else pretty hard. I couldn't communicate like I wanted. I only knew how to order a few things I liked to eat. I was not normal and I stuck out for everyone to see. But basketball, that was universal. Except for the smoke breaks at every time out or in-between games, which I politely declined while laughing. The game took my focus off of differences and I felt like I fit in.

Lately it feels like we've been focused on divisions. Masks, politics, citizenship, race, and so much more... And while there are certainly differences, there's one place where differences are not our focus: the Church. Today we get to focus on unity. When God created the Church, it was **created to be one**.

If you think being divided is something we're just struggling with, unfortunately you're wrong. The devil has used differences to distract believers for a long time. Really it's been from the beginning. As soon as there was a New Testament church, divisions between Jews and gentiles caused issues.

The Jewish believers had a long list of things God had been doing for them to point them toward Jesus. Special festivals, a government God had set up, and the promise of the Savior being passed down through them. God was the one who wanted to make them different. He wanted them to

stand out to all the nations so others might try to find out more and learn about his promises.

The gentiles did not have a background like that. You might know the background of these gentile believers in Ephesus. When Paul came through on one of his mission journeys, the city rioted and shouted “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” for hours. These gentiles had strong roots in worshipping false gods. These gentiles had no idea about the one true God and his promises.

That is, until God used Paul and he created a church there. In Ephesus God built up a new church full of Jews and gentiles, people who were different, but united as one trusting in Jesus as their Savior.

When you think about the oneness that they had in Jesus, isn't it ridiculous they focused on differences? The first half of Paul's letter to this church is helping them see how making divisions between Jews and gentiles was missing the point completely.

But you know. It's not just the church in Ephesus that struggles with divisions. It's what we're struggling with too. Step out of your shoes for a second and think. How have you been creating hostility between yourself and others? Are there walls you're building up? It's a struggle if you see someone and you don't first view them as someone Christ died for. Do you think more of yourself and less of others if they are different race? Is your way of life the only right way? What about traditions and patterns? Are they more important than welcoming someone new to our church? Do you think “You can't be a Christian if...” No, it's the same struggle the church in Ephesus had. Because we are messed up with sin, we all struggle with making divisions.

Ironically, this was a thought floating around in my head while working through this part of God's Word. “Should we get a fence?” It's a discussion Joanna and I have half-heartedly had in the last month. Our daughter is

getting faster every day and it would be great to have a place where she could run around without constantly chasing her. But here's the problem with a fence: we love our neighbors. Right now we can be outside and see them and wave at them and chat with them, no problem. A fence would take away opportunities to get to know people. And if Nora couldn't wave at people and scream in joy at seeing our neighbor, she'd be sad. A fence would keep her in but it would also block out so much.

If Jews and gentiles were going to come together, the wall between them needed to come down. And Jesus did it. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one. No group is far off from God anymore. The blood of Jesus was enough to cover the sins of the whole world.

It also destroyed two things. Back in the Old Testament there was always a thick curtain between the people and the special place in the Temple and Tabernacle. No one could go in except the High Priest and even then they were afraid he'd die. It was unthinkable anyone would get past that wall. Further outside the Temple building there was another wall. A wall that kept all gentiles far away from getting closer to the building to sacrifice on those closer altars. It kept them out. These walls were a symbol of the hostility that existed between God and sinful people. Between Jews and gentiles. And Jesus, destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. When Jesus died that curtain was ripped in half and that outer wall meant nothing anymore. Jesus' church was **created to be one.**

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Jesus destroys hostility. He gets rid of the sinful walls we create! He fulfilled all the laws we've broken. He brings us peace when we struggle with fighting. He creates in himself a unity between people and God and people and each

other. Jesus kills hostility so that our sins don't keep us away from God. We are **created to be one**, to be together with him in peace.

In getting ready to live in East Asia, I had a year to learn the language. One of the first things I learned was how to describe yourself, to tell people who you are. So I learned how to say that I liked playing basketball, that I was 22 years old, that I would be an English teacher at a university, that my favorite food was pizza, that I had a girlfriend who lived in Russia, and that we were engaged. Seven years later many of those things have changed. If you can think back seven years, I bet many things are different for you too! The food we like or where we live or the hobbies we have or the language we speak doesn't give us our identity. None of this is who we are.

Do you know who you are? You are **created to be one**. You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. These words take us from people who don't belong and people who are just being tolerated to people who are of the same nation to members of one family, God's family.

And the picture Paul ends this section with is a building. Jesus is the cornerstone that everything comes off of. But get this: in him you too are being built together. The building isn't done. Jesus is presently building us together.

So we get to be who Christ is making us, we are **created to be one**. You can break down walls by viewing people as ones Jesus died for. You can show respect and value for every person you meet, even those you don't understand. You have an opportunity to reflect Jesus' attitude by listening and truly caring. You get to live at peace finding ways to build each other up. Be who you are. You are **created to be one**.

In this world and culture of divisions, let that be the way that you stand out. Let everyone see what it looks like when you are **created to be one**. Amen.