

Dear community, this is my sermon as your minister...

The sermon text for today brings us to the Ephesian community.

Ephesus was a large, multi-ethnic centre of trade, commerce and culture. Capital city of the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus was an important seaport. In addition to having a significant Jewish community, Ephesus was home to many Greeks, Romans and other settlers from throughout the entire Mediterranean world. And in this big city, there was also the Christian community, formed by Christian Jews and Christian-Gentiles. The relationships between these two groups in the church were peaceful, however sometimes tension built up, especially when there was the need to take important decisions.

On the one hand, the Christian Jews considered themselves the first fruit of the church, because of their synagogue's background. On the other hand, the Christian Gentiles, thought they were the ones for whom Jesus came into the world.

It is to this fragmented community that the apostle Paul is writing. And Paul starts his letter saying "Remember", asking the Ephesians to think of how their life used to be, and how this has changed by their encounter with the

Christ. In a church where there was tension between two big groups, rather than picking up a side or appointing one groups as "right" and the other as "wrong" Paul shifts the focus on Christ, as the true core and source of the community.

Jesus who has destroyed the barrier, and tore the dividing wall of hostility says: "peace to you and to those who are near you", offering the Ephesians, and us, an alternative way to divisions. What Jesus is saying is to bury the hatchet of a meaningless competition, and to focus on him. That's the only way to find peace.

We find peace in Christ, because Christ **is** peace. And we need to pay attention to that, because when we say that Christ **IS** peace, we are saying that peace, as love, is *the* priority. Peace is not one part of the mission that we as Christians might choose to develop. Without peace, as well as without love, there is no church, there is no mission.

When we confess our faith in Christ, we also promise to follow Christ on the way of love and peace. Consequently, if we are surrounded by separation and destruction, we are called to do all what we can in order to overcome them and restore peace.

And so when we face tensions and divisions in our life and in our community, the invitation is rather to help each other focus on Christ, and *his peace, which surpasses all understanding, and will guard our hearts and minds.*

By dying and resurrecting, the text tells us that Jesus has created in himself a new humanity. In fact, in Jesus we are **one – new – created humanity**. Let's take a few seconds to let those words sink in our hearts.

We are new
we are one
we are a re-created/re-conceived humanity in Christ.

We are **New...**

In the text we hear words as Gentiles and Jews, circumcised and not-circumcised, aliens, strangers, living a life without hope. Those words describe a way of living according to a binary logic that sees differences as forces in competition with each other. This is a logic that inevitably creates division.

But the text tells us that in Christ we are a new creation, a creation grounded in Christ's peace, where differences are not creating divisions. On the contrary, they are an enrichment. *In Christ everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)* In God we are all made new, but we still keep our own characteristics. God's peace lead us towards unity not

towards uniformity. We are all beloved, just the way we are: Jews, Gentiles, British, European, Immigrant, Refugee, male, female, transgender, children, grown up, and so on. All these categories define our identity but do not define or influence God's love for us. This means that if we stay focussed on Christ, we cannot use those categories to create division or alienation. If we focus on Christ we can all share different ways to follow Christ on the way of peace.

In Christ we are **ONE...**

Through Jesus we have been reconciled to God. To reconcile means to be brought near, and so in Christ we are near God, part of God's family, sharing God's love and peace.

To be reconciled also means to be restored: what was once broken, estranged and without hope has now been made whole, brought back to life in God. To be reconciled also means to be able to settle, to finally come back home. To be reconciled means to be compatible, to be accepted for who we are, with our good sides and our edgy sides.

To be reconciled means that we are near God and that God is near us, right here, right now. God is surrounding us.

In Christ we are a created **humanity**...

This is a humanity that has Jesus at the very core of its existence. Jesus is the one to whom we belong and toward whom we are going. In him we find the strength to walk through the ups and downs in our life. When life presents us with destruction and separation, if we focus on Jesus, he will show us the path of love and peace, a path to share with the community.

In this one new created humanity, *we are not strangers anymore but we are citizens with the saints, we are members of the household of God.* In Christ we are joined together and we grow into a holy temple in the Lord. Once, we were strangers; once, we were without hope; now, we are at home, we are citizens. "Citizen is an individual who legally belongs to a country, either by birth or naturalization and is therefore invested with the rights, responsibilities and protection of that country."

Since we are citizens of the Christian community, following this definition, we are invested with the rights, responsibilities and protection of the church. And since the church is focussed on Christ, we have the right and the responsibility to grow in love.

We have the right and responsibility to be reconciled with God and with each other.

However, when we look around, and instead of seeing sisters and brothers, we see only Jews and Gentiles, British and European, Citizens and Refugees, then we know that we are not focussing on Jesus anymore. This is when we start building walls of division and create distance. This is when we are not fostering peace. And if we are not fostering peace, we cannot confess to be reconciled people in God. We who once had no hope and were strangers, cannot confess to follow the Christ if we cannot give hope to those who are now called strangers. We who have finally arrived at home, cannot share Christ's love if we close the door in the face of those who have lost their home, perhaps for ever. If we are isolated, closed in our little niche, we are not following Christ.

The text is very clear: in Christ we can grow and become a holy temple only if we join together. *For we are all one in Christ Jesus: there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female,* and I would add there is neither refugee or citizen. And so dear friends, let's thank God by whose power we have been given a new possibility, and approach the diversity as an enrichment. Let's be a new humanity, open to welcome sisters and brothers, willing to let the peace of Christ foster unity among diversity. Amen