

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
Sermon text: Ephesians 2:11-22  
Related Text: Psalm 23  
Date preached: July 19, 2009

One of the prevailing issues that all couples face from the time they start dating and going into their married life is the reconciling of two distinct upbringings, traditions and behaviors.

How will the house be decorated when there are two conflicting styles and both are adamant that theirs is the one that should prevail? Where are we going to spend the holidays when it is geographically impossible to spend them with each set of parents? That was a particularly hard issue for Amy's family when they realized we would not be home for Christmas Eve at Grandpa's.

Then what happens when the bride and groom are from two different religious backgrounds. Many a couple has struggled with reconciling protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs. Those struggles can be equally hard for Christians who marry a person without interest in church. The level of commitment can put a strain on family especially when it comes to children.

This is the top level issue that is being addressed in the reading from Ephesians. Going back centuries of

Jewish history it was a given that all males be circumcised. It was a law to be unquestioned. To fail would be to cut oneself off from the Jewish community.

At stake in the reading from Ephesians is the question, what is the role of circumcision in this new religious belief centering on Jesus' death and resurrection. It was the viewpoint of many that for non-Jews to be followers of Christ they must first become Jew, meaning they must first be circumcised.

That is not the case. Circumcision is not a prerequisite for being a follower of Christ. Likewise to the non-Jews the message is also clear that we are not to take this for granted. Allow me to demonstrate with an example that has been an issue for many Lutheran churches over the past few decades. When can one first take communion?

There was a time when it was taught and practiced that one could not have communion until they were confirmed. In other words, there was something you had to know, there were preparatory services that one had to attend to confess sin and there was a certain maturity level one had to have before receiving communion.

Lutheran teaching on Communion has always been that the sacrament is a gift of God's grace. That teaching then has impacted our practice so that one does not need to first be confirmed before receiving the sacrament. Yes, this means that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has no minimum age requirement that you have to reach before having communion. It does mean that we take seriously age appropriate instruction so that everyone has an awareness of the depth of this gift of God's grace.

The reconciliation of these two schools of practice is at the surface of deeper issues both in our Ephesians reading and in the example I noted. What does it mean to be included in the household of God?

It means that our inclusion into the family of God is not based on us at all. Our inclusion in the family of God is by Christ's work alone.

Look at the reading from Ephesians starting at 2:13. It is in Christ that those who were cut off meaning the Gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Continuing on it is Christ who has abolished the law so that both groups are untied through the cross. Any laws, any practices that serve to distinguish the haves

and the have nots, is cast aside. Everyone is granted access to God. There are no more alien residents. By the work of Christ all are declared saints and members of the household of God.

When we look at one another through the lens of Jesus death and resurrection a lot of things that harm our relationships with God and each other disappear. It means we no longer need to insist on the way we've always done it. It means we are free from the burden of having to having to save ourselves. It means we are free of having to live up to another person's expectations.

As people of God we are linked together through the blood of Christ. We can address human issues across country and political lines when we see our brothers and sisters in Christ in need. As people of God we trust in God to provide our needs so that we can use the resources or time, talent and treasure to meet the needs of our neighbor be it in Pleasant Unity, Latrobe, Greensburg, or New Orleans where our youth will travel this week.

Through Jesus Christ, we have been united by his death and resurrection to be a living vehicle through whom God himself is present among us and the world. AMEN.