

July 18, 2021 – 10:00 am
8th Sunday after Pentecost



“You are no longer strangers and foreigners.”
Ephesians 2:19

**ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

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Monday and Thursday 9-3

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Liturgy written by Rev. Lavon Bayler

*Please stand if comfortably able
Please respond with words in **bold** print
(NCH) New Century Hymnal

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRELUDE: “Abiding Faith” Louise Stairs

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Come away and rest for a while. Leave behind
your busyness to be fully present to God.

We have come for relief from life’s turmoil.

God gathers us as a shepherd gathers her sheep.

God’s steadfast love surrounds us here.

We are reminded of God’s enduring faithfulness.

This is God’s house, and we are God’s children.

God invites us to feel at home in this place.

We have a covenant with our Creator.

This is a time for renewal of our promises.

God calls for righteousness and justice.

God offers us goodness and mercy all our days.

***OPENING HYMN: NCH 397**

“Thank Our God for Sisters, Brothers”

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Rock of our salvation, we have accepted the invitation of Jesus to gather as your beloved people. We have been far away from you in our thoughts and separated from you in much that we do. Now we are together, seeking reconciliation with you and one another. We call on your steadfast love for assurance and healing. We feel your compassion for us and for all your children. We sense your longing for our wholeness and renewed faith and trust. You call us to be saints and apostles and prophets. We are overwhelmed, even as you draw us close. Amen.

Let us give God our thanksgiving and praise.

***GLORIA PATRI"**

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:11-22

New Living Translation

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were

living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can 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 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 6:30-34, 53—56**
Common English Bible (CEB)

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. ³¹ Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, “Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while.” ³² They departed in a boat by themselves for a deserted place.

³³ Many people saw them leaving and recognized them, so they ran ahead from all the cities and arrived before them. ³⁴ When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he began to teach them many things. ⁵³ When Jesus and his disciples had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret, anchored the boat, ⁵⁴ and came ashore. People immediately

recognized Jesus ⁵⁵ and ran around that whole region bringing sick people on their mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ Wherever he went—villages, cities, or farming communities—they would place the sick in the marketplaces and beg him to allow them to touch even the hem of his clothing. Everyone who touched him was healed.”

These are sacred Words
God wants to reveal today.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “No Longer Strangers”

(Summary – Paul describes the new covenant that includes the Gentiles in the people of God)

I realize that I usually share a message from the Gospel text. However, this week, when I read the text from Ephesians, I felt we needed to explore the lessons of unity found in these words. The conflicts between Jews and Gentiles so long ago are still with us in our conflicts with refugees, immigrants, people of color, and so many more. We build barriers to prevent all people living in God to be one in the name of Jesus Christ. Let’s see what we can learn. First the historical context of this passage. See if you can recognize any of

the actions done to keep people apart which are still being done today.

(The true author of Ephesians is still being debated. If it wasn't actually written by Paul, it was written by one of his disciples or "an interpreter" of Paul.)

By the time this passage was written, Gentiles had won their right to be full-fledged members of the people of God. But it had been a huge struggle, as the letters of Paul attest. In fact, this was clearly the most significant controversy faced by the early church in the first few decades of its existence. As the Book of Acts shows, it was not a foregone conclusion that Gentiles would be admitted to the church and enjoy equal status with Jews. Even some of the most prominent Jewish Christians, such as Peter, found it difficult to admit them as equals. Eventually the matter was resolved, largely through the efforts of Paul, and the author of this reading views the struggle in retrospect.

First, our passage depicts the changed status of the Gentiles. Their former condition is described in starkly hopeless terms. By the circumcised, they were judgmentally stereotyped as "the uncircumcision". This reminds us of how racial and ethnic struggles often degenerate to the level of hurling cliches designed to exclude and belittle.

(name calling). The metaphors chosen are coldly distant: "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world!" (Without God? That's pretty harsh.)

The Jews had an immense contempt for the Gentiles. They said that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell, and that God loved only Israel of all the nations that God had made. It was not even lawful to give help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for your assistance might help bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Before Christ, the barriers were up; after Christ, the barriers were down. Before Christ, the Gentiles had no hope of a Messiah and they were strangers from the covenants on which God's promises were based.

However, beginning in verse 13 we can read better news. "But, as things now are, because of what Christ Jesus has done, you who were once far off have been brought near, at the price of the blood of Christ. For it is he who is our peace; it is he who made both Jew and Gentile into one, and who broke down the middle wall of the barrier

between, and destroyed the hatred between Jews and Gentiles by coming in the flesh (Jesus), and by wiping out the law of commandments with all its decrees. This he did that in himself he might make the two into one new person, by making peace between them, and that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, after he had slain the animosity by what he did.”

This is the message that Paul was preaching to all listeners. Jesus was the Messiah who came for all, not some. Jesus is the new covenant; not the covenant of the ancient times (Old Testament). Noah and the ark came before Abraham and they were not circumcised, so why should Gentile men be circumcised? It would be another barrier to the new believers, as James said.

Paul told them that Christ had destroyed any barriers to faith in Jesus. “He is our peace.” It is in a shared love of him that people come to love each other. If Jews and Gentiles can love Christ the same, then they can love each other. (Having something in common brings people together.) That peace is won at the price of his blood, for the great awakener of love is the cross. The sight of that cross awakens in the hearts of men and women of all nations love for Christ, and only when they all love Christ will they love each other.

It is not through treaties and organizations that peace comes. There can be peace only in Jesus Christ.

Those are powerful words. It sounds so easy. Love can bring all of us together in peace. But it can be harder to do than to just read it. Perhaps you can find more words in this passage that can help you love people who you consider “un-loveable”. Read it over and see what message your heart hears. Amen.

MUSIC: “People Need the Lord” Steve Green
Video by Jubilee Chorus

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Beginning with silent personal prayer. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, continue your work of creating, redeeming, and sustaining. Create new associations of people in neighborhoods and nations and internationally to accomplish your work in the world. Redeem those whose lives at present are lived for unworthy ends, but whose energies could be channeled into lines of positive accomplishment not only for themselves but for others.

Sustain those who grow weary in doing good and who see little or nothing being achieved in their efforts to serve you.

Turn away forces of evil in the world by your continued prodding of the individual conscious and the resistance of your people to injustice and sin of every kind. With the call to repentance, send the church the good news of Christ, who continues to teach those who will be taught and heals the sick in body and mind and spirit. Hear our prayers for all those on our prayer list and those we hold in our hearts.

Eternal God, we remember before you those who have lived with us who have directed our steps in the Way, opened our eyes to the truth, inspired our hearts by their witness, and strengthen our wills by their devotion. We rejoice in their lives dedicated to your service, whether they are still with us or they dwell with you in heaven. All these things we pray in your Son's Holy name which taught us to pray . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as, we

forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769

Hear our prayer, O God, hear our prayer, O God; Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.

INVITATION TO SHARE:

OFFERTORY: "Prayer is the Key to Heaven but Faith Unlocks the Door" Don Gibson

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
God for all that love has done.
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

Receive our best, gracious God, as we offer ourselves along with these tokens of thanks. Establish your rule in our midst so we may proclaim your reign in the world. Send us where you need us most. Use our gifts to reduce alienation and to build community. Teach us to live as sisters and brothers who find you in one

another and respond in love to each other's needs. Amen.

***SENDING HYMN: NCH 575 "O For a World"**

***RESPONSIVE BENEDICTION:**

Live with hope, for God is with us every day. Live in peace, for God turns us from hostility.

We are one in Christ, who died for us.

We are one in the Spirit who creates community.

Renew your covenant vows with God and people.

Celebrate the oneness of humanity in Christ.

Go with us in the love and peace of Christ.

Amen.

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE:** Three-fold Amen

"Amen, Amen, Amen"

POSTLUDE: "Exaltation" Robert J. Hughes

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Nelson Libell, Joe Knapp, Jim Garrett, Agnes Doctolero, Julie Walker, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinietz, Warren Neff, Baby Hannah Mosco, Jack Harris, Wayne Huff.

PLEASE CALL THE OFFICE
IF YOU KNOW ANYONE
IN EITHER MEMORIAL HOSPITALS