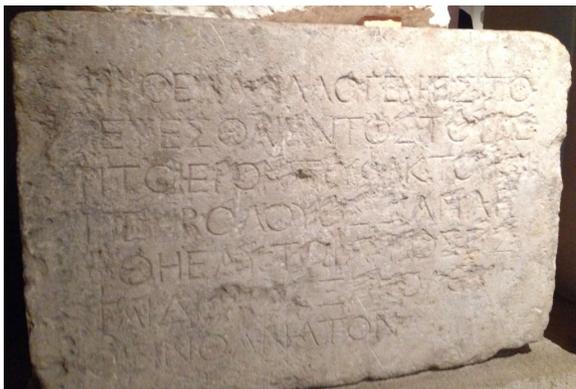


Embracing Mystery: Dividing Wall of Hostility



What passage in all the Bible could be more timely than Ephesians 2:13-16? Paul reminds his readers (the original ones, and us!) first that "you were separated from Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our Peace."

Of course, God is everywhere, and God is always with us. The separation is in our own souls; we live as if we are without God in the world. It's doing: I'll do whatever I prefer today, without asking if it is of God, or if it's hurtful to others or God's adventure. It's also a disposition: I'm on my own, I don't feel God, I'm lost, without hope, full of little but anxiety and weariness.

Reading slowly, we notice Paul's wording: it's not that we go to be near God. No, we have been "brought near." Like a gentle parent, God reaches a loving arm around us and pulls us close. God is doing this with you right now. It's that grace, God's purpose for you happening to you. Jesus said "Peace" a lot, calming jittery disciples and violent storms. Jesus not only speaks and brings peace. He actually is Peace. Ponder that for a while.

And then, if Christ brought near those far off, if Christ is our Peace, then divisions among ourselves make no sense, and crumble into nothing: "He is our Peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (verse 15). Jesus and some of his readers had seen what archaeologists have found: a 4 foot high stone wall in the temple precincts warning Gentiles not to go any further, on pain of death! Walls of separation are abhorrent to Jesus. I bet he sighed and grimaced every time he passed it. He decided to die on the cross to put an end to such nonsense, absorbing all conflict into his suffering body.

Right now, we Americans seem so very fond of our divisions, even if we growl about them. Political ideology, denominational squabbling and race are high and hard walls no one can surmount or bypass. But division grieves Jesus' heart, and we keep crucifying him over and over with our cocky other-ing of the others. If you're reconciled to God, it's not an option to refuse to be reconciled to others.

It's fear, of course. As I've repeated quite a few times, Walter Brueggemann said everybody's afraid. Some are afraid the world they've treasured is crumbling around them; others are afraid the world they dream of will never come to be.

But Jesus is our Peace. And their Peace too. The closer we get to Jesus, divisions come down, one stone, and then another. Perhaps it is the task of Jesus' Church during such days to be the healer, the restorer. Church pretty much replicates all the divisions in society, foolishly thinking God's on my side of the barrier, and those guys are numbskulls. Perhaps we will be Peace to one another, and in our community and world - and then others will see, and conclude we do have something to offer after all.

Source: Daily email (October 1, 2020) from Dr. James Howell, Sr. Pastor at Myers Park United Methodist Church