

From Hostile to Hostel
Ephesians 2:11-22
18 July 2021

This Sunday the lectionary takes to the second chapter of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians... to a passage beginning with verse 11. I need to tell you that it's fairly **provocative** material. And I am **grateful**... as **well** as being **provoked**... that Paul and the Spirit have brought it before us. However, before I begin with **verse 11**, I think you need to hear how Paul **sets up** this **provocative** passage. You need to see the frame in which it sits. You need to hear and wrap your heart around what Paul says in verses 8, 9 and 10. This:

*For **by grace** you have been saved...
through **faith**...and **this** (even **this**) is not your **own** doing;
it is the gift of God –
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
For we are what **he** has made us,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

You've probably heard of *the self-made man*, or *woman*. Maybe you've even thought of yourself like that, to some degree. Pulled **yourself** up by your own bootstraps, eh? Good for you! But the self-made **Christian**? There's no such thing. Not as Paul saw it, anyway. Not even your **faith**, your ability to trust in God, is your **own** doing. It is a **gift from God**, the Apostle asserts. We **are** what **God** has **made** us. We are created **in Christ Jesus** for good works. However, even that lifeway of good works has been prepared **for us** by God. We are not **self-made**. We are God-made.

So then, Paul goes on to say, starting with verse 11:

***Remember** that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” – a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands –*

***remember** that you were at **that** time **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.*

*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; in his flesh he **has** made both groups **into one** and has broken **down** the dividing wall... that is, **the hostility between us**.*

*He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might **create in himself** one **new** humanity in place of the two, thus making peace... and (that he) might **reconcile both** groups to God in one body through the cross... thus putting to **death** that hostility through it.*

*So, he came and proclaimed **peace** to you who were far off **and peace** to those who were near; for through him **both** of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

***So** then, you are **no longer** strangers and aliens, but you are **citizens with the saints** and also **members of the household of God**, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*

*In him the whole structure **is joined together** and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are **built together spiritually** into a dwelling place for God.*

- The Word of God, for a people God dearly loves!

Are there things that you **hate** to remember, things it hurts you to recall, **memories** that cause you to cringe... or that you've buried or **pushed** away in an effort to keep them from affecting you?

Remember, **Paul** says, that at one time you were **without** Christ... **aliens** from the commonwealth of Israel... **strangers** to the covenants of promise... having **no** hope and **without God** in the world.

Remember **that**? **Why** remember that **now**? Does Paul want us to be frightened? To be ashamed? To be paralyzed by the thought of it?

Honestly, I **don't** think so. Rather, I'd say that Paul's hoping it will help us to be **awestruck** by where and who we **are** at **this** time... through the saving grace of God... through the love God **has** for us in Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to **remember** the plight we **were** in... so we will **now** be **filled up** with gratitude and **drawn** a good bit closer to God... so we'll be **inspired** to do some of the good

work God has prepared for us to be about... and **encouraged** as we journey along on the challenging way of life God has set all of us on together.

By grace you have been saved, he declares... **moved** by God from one place to another. In this sense, **salvation** is about a God-enabled movement from hostility to peace: First and foremost, **from** hostility to God... to peace **with God**. Second and significantly, from hostility to peace with **all** who're part of the household of God... everyone on whom God has poured out God's grace. **Salvation** is peace secured and maintained **by God in Christ**. It's the peace we are brought into... peace we live into and **share** with one another... with all who've been brought near to God in Christ.

He came, Paul reminds us, and **preached** peace to you who **were** far off... and peace to those who were near... giving **all** of us access in **one** Spirit to God. Think of **that!** **Consider** that! Realize and understand **with whom** you have been brought together, with **whom** you are now joined, by God in Christ. The dividing walls **are** broken **down**. We are part of a new dwelling being built up around Christ, the keystone and peace-maker himself.

You know, the larger society **in which** you and I live... and **of** which we're a part... is in so **many** ways **divided** up now, cut up into camps. There are those who are near **and** those who're far. There are patriots and protesters... been here's and come here's... binary and non-binary folk... haves and have-nots... reds and blues... millennials and boomers... vaxers and anti-vaxers... "spiritual but not religious" types and mainliners who've been moving steadily to the sidelines. We are **divided up, indeed**. And throughout all of that divided-up **turf** there is so much **hostility** playing out... so much hostility at **deadly** play, in places all over. Even here. You **know** that there is.

God, **how** we need **some** way to **move** ourselves, our community, our society **away** from all of that hostility! Is there **any** way we can? Is there **some** way we can?

No, says our Savior, *I am the way*.

He **is** our **peace**... right now and already. **In** his flesh he **has broken down** the dividing wall of hostility between us... (it is no longer actually there, even if we **act** as if it **is**). He has broken down the wall to create **in himself** one **new** humanity... thus making peace and putting to death the hostility.

He **is** our peace. Hallelujah! Sometimes we **remember** that, here at Bon Air Presbyterian. And sometimes we **forget** it, too. But pretty **often** we seem to remember it. And doesn't it fill us up with gratitude! Doesn't it inspire us for the good works God is planning for us. Doesn't it encourage us to allow Christ to keep on assembling us into the household of faith... into a dwelling place for **God**? Doesn't it?

Bon Air Church – just over half a year ago the Spirit bestowed upon your leaders a fresh **Mission...** **and** it gave them a compelling **Vision** of what this community of faith will become when it is faithful in addressing its God-given Mission. They **discerned** that

*Bon Air Presbyterian **will** be a diverse congregation – open, affirming, supportive of each other, and demonstrating faithfulness through worship, education, fellowship and service that is valued by the community.*

That is what they saw. That's what they received and accepted. It's what they've begun to wrap their hearts around. And, Bon Air Church – that **is** your work as well. But, it will **not** be your **own** doing; rather, it will be the gift of God.

Reflecting your **movement** from hostility to hospitality, you are going to be becoming, more and more, something of a **hostel** – a place people come to find walls broken down... where people learn to live together as members of **God's** household... where diverse **generations** dwell together in peace **they** do not manufacture, but rather peace that is bestowed **upon** them... where they will learn to live, more and more naturally, with gratitude and generosity, care and creativity... **as** they become a **temple** in which others **also** find the peace of God, the presence of the Holy One dwelling there amidst them.

May it be **so**. It **will** be so... through the grace and working of God in Christ.