



Global Communion

Ephesians 2:11-18

November 4, 2018

My message today morning is going to be a bit different than one of my normal sermons. We are intentionally broadening our focus to global concerns within the body of Christ. We are taking time to remember and celebrate the amazing way that God is working in our world, to reach people from every nation on the planet. What ties this whole message together is Jesus; Jesus and the impact that He is making all around the world. An impact among many different people groups, many different languages, and many different cultures.

We're going to read our Scripture passage together today a few verses at a time. As we do this, I want us to consider these words through the lens of the Lord's Supper. Today's passage reveals that the body and blood of Jesus not only brings us into union with Christ and a right relationship with God, but it also brings us into unity with one another as fellow Bros./Sis. in Christ. Ephesians 2:11-13 begins, "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

As a Jew, Paul is now writing to the Gentiles in Ephesus to remind them that they were once far away from the Hebrew God, "But now in Christ Jesus," they have been brought near to God. But, God is not the only one to whom they have been brought near. As believing Jews and Gentiles are each brought near to God through Jesus Christ, they are then consequently also brought near to one another.

There used to be a strong racial divide between these 2 groups, but now something incredible has happened. Ephesians 2:14, goes on to explain, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." This barrier may very well be Paul's allusion to the wall of the temple, that used to divide Jews and Gentiles into separate areas of worship.¹ Jesus destroyed not only this physical wall of separation but also this longstanding racial wall. According to Ephesians 2:15-16, Jesus did this, "by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." There's a bit of a play on words here "in one body to reconcile both of the them." We are all reconciled by one body, the physical body of Jesus. AND we are all reconciled into one body, the Church, this "one new humanity."²

This is why it's important for us, on a communion Sunday, not only to remember its vertical aspect in making us right with God, but also its horizontal aspect in making us right with our fellow believers...Fellow believers of different ethnicities, languages, cultures, and skin colors. This division between Jews and Gentiles, doesn't make much of an impression on most of us. As modern Americans, it feels pretty distant. However, there are certainly other racial barriers that are much closer to home, like barriers between white and Native peoples, for example. In Christ, THAT barrier is also destroyed. The racial hostility and division that still exist in our community, should by no means still exist in our church. The fact is, at one time, both whites and Natives fit this same description back in verse 12. We were BOTH "...separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."

¹ There's a reference to this back in Acts 21:28 where Paul was accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple and defiling it. Defiling it how? Merely by their physical presence because they were not ethnic Jews.

² Learn more about this entire passage by requesting the transcript from the sermon, "Reconciled – One New Humanity" which I preached back on June 26, 2016.

We used to share this same spiritual status as foreigners. Now, however, through Christ, we share the status of fellow citizens of heaven.³ Ephesians 2:17-18 goes on to say, “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.” Just as these verses are true for believing Jews and Gentiles, they are true for believing whites and Natives. All of us have access to God by one and the same Spirit.⁴ Praise God for the racial reconciliation that we can enjoy through Jesus!

Our God is the God of all nations, of all peoples. And, because of this, we enjoy a Global Communion. In honor of this Global Communion, let’s celebrate some ways that God is at work in our world:

One way that God is at work in our world is that...

1. God’s Word is going out to all nations. Our Global Partner’s, Andy and Heidi Kellogg, are committed to this very cause through their ministry with Wycliffe Bible Translators. In fact, Heidi Kellogg was here at our November 4 service and gave us a brief update. Their most current three prayer needs are:

- 1) For Andy in his new role as Vice President of Bible Translation for Seed Company’s Bible translation projects around the world.
- 2) For stamina for Andy and Heidi during this busy season of life.
- 3) For spiritual health for their children.

You can learn more from them by emailing her at heidiheem@gmail.com

Praise God that His Word is going out to all nations!

A 2nd way that God is at work in our world is that...

2. The Gospel is penetrating difficult places.⁵ Hebrews 13:3 reminds us to, “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” This is a firm call to sincere empathy toward our suffering Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Today, November 4, is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

This past week I read about a woman named Asia Bibi.⁶ Back in 2010 she was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to hang. CNN reported that just this past Wednesday, “Pakistan’s Supreme Court has acquitted [this] Christian woman who has been on death row for almost eight years.”⁷ What an amazing answer to prayer! And yet, she and her family are currently seeking asylum. They have not yet safely gotten out of Pakistan.

Now, it’s difficult for us to really know the precise details behind a story like this. But, it’s sobering none the less. And it reminds us to pray for our fellow bros./sis. in Christ around the world who don’t have anything close to the religious freedoms that we enjoy. Before I knew anything about Asia’s story, I had already planned to share a video with you about persecution in Pakistan. Pakistan is not



³ See Philippians 3:20.

⁴ Read Acts 10:1 through 11:18, esp. 10:28 and 11:18.

⁵ 1 Timothy 2:1-4 says, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Earlier this year, I was reading about the persecution of Christian believers in North Korea, one of the toughest places in the world to be a Christian today. As I was reading the article, I read something that stopped me in my tracks, “Pray for the salvation of Kim Jong Un...” (*The Voice of the Martyrs*, February, 2018, p. 6.) What? Pray for that guy! Yes, for that guy. 1 Timothy 2 says, it “pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” So, right there during my quiet time, I bowed my head and prayed for the salvation of Kim Jong Un. It wasn’t an easy prayer, but it was a sincere prayer. The more I thought about it, the more I realized just how amazing it would be for him to come to Christ. Can you just imagine the changes in North Korea if their top government leader became a genuine follower of Christ? (The article went on to remind us that we should consider what Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar back in Daniel 4:27, “Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.” Wow, that we really bold of Daniel! It reminds me of the fact that some of us have privileged positions. We have access to particular people that none of the rest of us have. Consider Esther 4:14, “And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” If you have been waiting for just the right moment or just the right opportunity, you need to consider that the right moment may very well be right now. Don’t wait any longer.)

⁶ “**AH see ah BeeBee**” Learn more at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/31/asia/pakistan-asia-bibi-blasphemy-intl/index.html>

⁷ Ibid.

the only place on the planet where Christians are persecuted, but learning about Pakistan gives us an idea of the kind of things many Christ-followers in various parts of the world are enduring. This video was put together by Voice of the Martyrs specifically for the 2018 International Day of Prayer. You can watch it by searching YouTube for “International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (2018)” or by clicking on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mATdRtRCCuM> This video is well worth your time.

Here is a list of 10 suggestions for ways that we can pray for our persecuted Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Pray that they will:

1. Sense God’s presence (Hebrews 13:5)
2. Know we are praying for them (2 Timothy 1:3)
3. Experience God’s comfort (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17)
4. See God open doors to evangelism (Colossians 4:3)
5. Boldly share the gospel (Acts 4:29)
6. Mature in their faith (Colossians 1:28–29)
7. Be granted wisdom in covert ministry work (Acts 9:23–25)
8. Remain joyful amid suffering (Acts 5:41)
9. Forgive and love their persecutors (Matthew 5:44)
10. Be rooted in God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17)⁸

Why not change the picture on your phone’s home screen to that of a globe? Or find some other way to consistently remind yourself to pray for our fellow Christ-followers around the globe. Let’s pray for other people groups, for Christians being persecuted, for Christian workers around the world, and for people that we know who are taking short-term trips. Let’s remember the Global Communion that we share with Brothers and Sisters in Christ who come with different languages, cultures, and skin colors.

Revelation 14:6 describes a beautiful scene: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” **Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us join in proclaiming the gospel to all peoples. And, let us also celebrate the Global Communion that the gospel brings! Amen.**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on November 4, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

⁸ Do you notice anything that seems to be missing from this list? I was challenged when I realized that there’s nothing in here about having their persecution stopped.