

## Ephesians 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying the wall of hostility that divided them <sup>15</sup>when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh. He did this to create in himself one new person out of the two, in this way making peace. <sup>16</sup>And he did this to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by putting the hostility to death on it. <sup>17</sup>He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup>For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. <sup>20</sup>You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

### You Are Jesus' Sheep!

The lessons for the Ninth Sunday in Pentecost carry the theme of warning God's people against false doctrine and urging them to remain firm in the true doctrine.

Today's Old Testament lesson showed exactly that. God condemned the shepherds, or leaders, of Israel for scattering the sheep. He promised to send his own shepherd who would rescue and tend the flock so that not one of his sheep would be lost.

In the Gospel Jesus was trying to get away from the crowds so that he and his disciples can have some rest, but the people continued to follow him. Mark describes the people as sheep without a shepherd. The Savior could see their great need for a shepherd, and so he had compassion on them and took extra time to teach them.

Today's Second Lesson, or Epistle Lesson, serves as our sermon text. Paul does not use the words "shepherd," or "sheep," but Paul vividly reports what our Good Shepherd, Jesus, has done for all people. In so doing he shows that **You Are Jesus' Sheep!**

#### *I. Once you were lost*

Paul begins the lesson by saying: "But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13, EHV). You and I were once "far away." *Once you were lost.*

David recorded God's attitude toward sinners in Psalm 5: "The arrogant cannot stand before your eyes. You hate all evildoers" (Psalm 5:5, EHV). God is perfect and holy. He wants absolutely nothing to do with sin, thus each human being is born "far away." Our sin separates us from God.

Most of us are not of Jewish descent. As such, we were "far away" in another sense: the Jews were God's special, chosen people.

People in the Gentile nations, in other words, non-Jews, were not given the same direct revelation of God's will. Gentiles were included in the promise given to Adam and Eve — the promise that said "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel." (Genesis 3:15, EHV). But the Gentile nations did not pass on the promise from generation to generation, nor did they have the prophets who would periodically receive revelation directly from God to remind the people of that promise.

Is it not a given that churches would be all about "passing on the promise"? Yet far too many of them obscure the gospel and the need for that promise and thereby confuse and mislead many

people.

I have been in church services where there was no real sermon. There was a liturgy of sorts. In some cases the liturgical worship service was very elaborate, meaning to draw attention to our Mighty God. Lessons were read in these services, and in them the people had the opportunity to hear the gospel. But when it came time for a sermon there wasn't one. Oh, the people present would *believe* there had been a sermon, because there was some sort of message, but it wasn't a sermon.

You see, *every* sermon *must* speak about the message of Christ and him crucified. *Every* sermon must contain the message of sin and grace. *Every* sermon must show the hearers that they, too, need this salvation, and it must show them where and how they can obtain it as their own.

Too often when I have attended non-WELS churches I have heard what can best be described as a homily. The pastor or priest in a Homily gives a sort of commentary on the Scripture reading that was just presented to the congregation. It may or may not talk about sin and grace and the way to eternal life, it may just contain some sort of life-lesson from the reading. *That* is not a sermon. Often the name Jesus is never mentioned in a homily. Usually the subject is really just moralizing—telling the people that doing good things is to be their number one goal in life.

This kind of message does not feed Christian faith. It does not explain to the worshiper that their sin separates them from God and that they *need* the forgiveness Jesus won. It does not tell them the refreshing message of the Shepherd who leads them to the quiet waters and green pastures of his Word and refreshes them with the forgiveness he has brought for them.

“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:1, EHV). God promised disaster to such shepherds in the Old Testament lesson. They will have to answer the Lord as to why they failed to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified for the sins of the world to their people.

In the past it was often lack of knowledge which excluded people from the family of God. The fact that anyone can get on the internet and find the entire text of the Bible in many different translations means that no one *need* be ignorant of what God has done for them. Tragically many are misled by the very under shepherds who are supposed to be feeding and nourishing them with God's Word. When people keep attending and unquestioningly accepting a message devoid of any gospel message, eventually they *will* lose their faith. There is simply no alternative.

## *II. Jesus found you and brought you back.*

You were once in this condition, as well. Perhaps you attended a church which did not feed you the message of the gospel. Perhaps you were brought as a small child to be baptized into the family of God.

**You Are Jesus' Sheep!** <sup>1</sup> *Once you were lost, but* <sup>2</sup> *He found you and brought you back.*

But “You... have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying the wall of hostility that divided them” (Ephesians 2:13-14, EHV). Whatever your own personal scenario was, the fact remains that you were hopelessly separated from the family of God. Something had to break down those barriers.

That something is Christ Jesus. He broke the barriers “when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh. He did this to create in himself one new person out of the two, in this way making peace” (Ephesians 2:15, EHV).

The law, with all its regulations and commandments, kept the barriers strong. Obedience to those laws was necessary to be a part of God's people. It was oppressive, because no one could keep those laws satisfactorily. They must constantly wonder whether they had been good

enough. Endlessly they offered sacrifices to God for their failures.

Jesus broke the barriers by abolishing the law “in his flesh.” He made himself subject to every aspect of the law. He fulfilled all its demands.

Jesus broke the barriers in one act. Endless sacrifices are no longer necessary because Jesus made one sacrifice. He sacrificed his own body on the tree for every act of disobedience ever committed against God’s law.

In abolishing the law Jesus did not give us a license to do whatever we want. Jesus abolished the idea that anyone is taken to heaven because of their attempts to be obedient to the law. The barriers are removed because you *know* that Jesus did it *all* for you.

Jesus made sure that you have a life free of barriers. God always intended salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. Paul shows the evidence when he quotes from Isaiah 57: “He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near” (Ephesians 2:17, EHV). Now that Jesus has come, the barriers are completely removed. Both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled — made one — with God again.

When Jesus removed the barriers he showed without a doubt that all people are saved in exactly the same way — through faith in Christ. In the Old Testament people looked ahead to the Messiah, who is Jesus, for their salvation. New Testament Christians look back at the completed history of salvation.

People are not saved by externals. Your allegiance to a particular denomination isn’t going to save you. The fact that your parents or grandparents were faithful Christians won’t keep you from hell. One particular method of worship is not essential either.

What *is* necessary is faith in that Savior. Faith in Jesus makes you a member of that one important organization — the Holy Christian Church — the community of all true believers united under Christ.

Paul shows us the blueprints of this church. It is: “Built... with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone.” (Ephesians 2:20, EHV).

The Holy Christian Church is built first of all on Christ. The word translated as “cornerstone” can also be translated “capstone.” A cornerstone is the first stone laid in the foundation, the stone which gives every other stone its direction and placement. A capstone is the last stone in an arch which holds the arch together.

Jesus is really both, isn’t he? As cornerstone he gives each member, each building block, its direction and placement. As the capstone he holds the Church together.

Jesus’ Holy Christian Church is also “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20, EHV). These holy men were divinely inspired to record the message of the Bible — the good news about Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Building this Holy Christian Church is a continuous process. Paul writes: “In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup>In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21-22, EHV). As we grow closer to him and closer to one another the building takes shape. It fits together to become a “holy temple in the Lord.”

#### Conclusion.

The job of every person in the pew is to make sure that this congregation continues the process of becoming a “holy temple to the Lord.” It won’t happen if you aren’t hearing the message of Jesus Christ from this pulpit. You won’t be doing me or any member of the

congregation any favors if I fail to mention Christ and his salvation in a so-called sermon and then you walk out of church and compliment me.

Many churches do all kinds of things to make it appealing. Some believe that a Starbucks franchise as you walk in is a good idea. Some focus on things that often get labeled as “high church,” like a processional carrying the cross and Bible up the aisle to begin the service, or using incense, or a special way of lighting the candles during the service is important. But if they don’t explain during the service what is important about Christ, the whole thing is meaningless.

In the end the externals aren’t that important, are they? It really doesn’t matter whether we use the Common Cup or Individual Glasses for Holy Communion. It isn’t so important whether the liturgy is familiar or unfamiliar, or whether the hymns are easy or difficult to sing.

What *is* important is the message of Christ. Is that message in the sermon? Is it in the hymns? The liturgy?

May it never be necessary for the Lord to say of this congregation: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:1, EHV). Once you were lost, but through his own precious blood, Jesus found you and brought you back because **You Are Jesus’ Sheep!** May it always be said that the shepherds of Holy Trinity remind you of this every week. May it always be said of Holy Trinity congregation: “We preach Christ and him crucified.” Amen.