

[11](#) But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways [12](#) had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. [13](#) Now because of Christ - dying that death, shedding that blood - you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything. [14](#) The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. [15](#) He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. [16](#) Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. [17](#) Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. [18](#) He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. [19](#) That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all - irrespective of how we got here - in what he is building. [20](#) He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone [21](#) that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day - a holy temple built by God, [22](#) all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Have you ever watched a child play at a public playground? Kids make friends so easily. They run around playgrounds making up games, helping one another navigate equipment, seemingly enjoying the bond of life-long friendships even though they just met one another ten minutes ago. It doesn't matter if one kid is white, another brown, another black, they only see themselves reflected back...tiny humans that are inhabiting the same space at the same time and therefore should enjoy one another's company. This is the image I think of when I read that Jesus said it is those with childlike faith that will inherit the kingdom of heaven...that kind of openness and acceptance.

What a child on the playground can teach us is that hostilities based on race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, or legal status are contrived. A child looks and sees a fellow human...adults look and see division...we see what one research team calls, "imagined otherness"...we imagine all the ways this person is different than us because they look different, or they sound different, or they came to be in this place by a different route than we did. A child is climbing walls, while adults are constructing them.

Sadly, when our imagined otherness determines that the "other" is so different from us that we can't possibly have any commonalties, we no longer look at them as a reflection of our self...our humanness is not recognized in theirs...therefore we see

them as less human. As those same researchers pointed out...“Some of human history's greatest atrocities—genocide, slavery, ethnic cleanings—are rooted in our ability to dehumanize people from other social, political, or cultural groups. We know this is true, we see it every day...we hear it every day. People are called names, identified by stereotypes, compared to animals, monsters, and then the path to naming them as an enemy is certainly well paved and easy to travel.

I was reading an article this week someone had written about this Ephesian's text and his words were like a punch in the gut...“In our 20th century worldview, we are experiencing a construction of walls of hostility and barriers of exclusion, leading to the resurfacing of racism, sexism, killing of innocent lives, and the closing of borders. Immigrants from all over the world are experiencing rejection from their fellow human family, making the events of the cross meaningless.”

Making the events of the cross meaningless? Can we do that? Can we, by our actions...our hostilities...our dehumanizing others and waging war against them...minimize the power of Christ's sacrifice?

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he is begging the followers of Jesus to tear down the walls of hostility that have divided them for centuries. He is asking them to stop looking at who they were, where they came from, whether they bore the marks of the Jewish faith or lacked the marks of any faith...and instead look at one another for who they really are...fellow humans...brothers and sisters who belong to the same father. He reminds them that the old way had laws designed to keep them from seeing one another's humanness...but Christ came so that a different way is possible.

16 Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility.

17 Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders.

18 He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

That's the power of the cross and when we do contrary, I think we diminish that power in the world.

In other letters, Paul will say similar things...in Christ there is no male or female, no Jew or Greek, no slave or free...but all are one with Christ. Luke, in telling us the details of the birth of the church at Pentecost, makes it clear that God was opening the door for all people, of all nations, all languages, to come together and hear the good news of Christ's resurrection power.

In scripture after scripture, diversity is celebrated. In letter, after letter, hostility with one another is condemned...and yet look around...listen to the news...hear the way we talk

about others, the things we do in the name of “patriotism” and in the name of “Christian nationalism.”

If Christ brought us together through his death on the cross...and we are intent to practice hostility and division...what does that say for Christ’s sacrifice? If Christ came and preached peace to outsiders as well as insiders...and we are intent that only insiders are allowed...what does this say for Christ’s purpose?

What scripture tells us is that diversity is part of God’s design...it is not inherently problematic. It is not our differences that divide us because our humanness should overcome division...it is our hostility over those differences that is the problem.

Here is where it is so important that we embrace the peace in the purple. We have a red side that wants strict border control and a blue side that wants an easier path to immigration...and while it is prudent to say we need sensible, humane border control...it is also scriptural to say that regardless of whichever political policy you align with...the PEOPLE...the human brothers and sisters that reside as our neighbors, whether documented or undocumented, whether Republican or Democrat, are to be treated in the same way we treat those we view as “insiders.”

We must live in the purple enough to see that we can have human laws and still treat people with justice and kindness. We can have sensible border control and still find ways to be empathetic to the plight of political asylum seekers and those facing devastating poverty. We can vote for policies and still not harass, assault, and dehumanize our neighbors who vote for different policies.

If we can’t love as Christ loves. If we can’t live like children on the playground. What did Christ’s death really teach us? What did his sacrifice mean?

Hostilities are not of Christ...they are created by our imagined otherness...and that is not in keeping with the scriptural truth that Jesus taught us.

I was thinking this week about the Civil Rights movement of the 60’s, it was a big topic in our Community Conversation across the Aisle on Wednesday. It reminded me of a story I had read about the Friendship Nine...a group of nine Black students from Friendship College who went to the lunch counter at a five and dime in Rock Hill South Carolina in February 1961.

We know the horrific treatment of our Black brothers and sister, of other people of color in America, from the Trail of Tears to slavery, we have used name-calling, abuse, fear tactics, murder, bullying and violence, to dehumanize those we saw as “other.” We are not proud of this history. But in 1961, our nation was still struggling with changing the way we treat one another.

Up until that February day, Blacks who were fighting for equality and an end to racism, would protest, get arrested, post bail, and move on. But the Friendship Nine got together and decided they were tired of paying fines to an unjust system. They vowed that if they got arrested, they would refuse bail and serve their sentence. They were arrested, they were fined a \$100 bail or 30 days hard labor...and they chose the 30 days hard labor. It started a trend they called, "Jail, no bail" as a way to bring awareness to the injustice they faced. Injustice made possible because they were seen as less than human... "imagined otherness."

In 2015, the Town of Rock Hill, South Carolina, did something extraordinary. With the original lawyer representing them, the remaining eight members of the Friendship Nine stood in a Rock Hill courthouse and faced Judge John C Hayes, III – the nephew of the judge who had sentenced them to hard labor 54 years before for the crime of sitting at a lunch counter...and this time, the judge vacated their sentences and the prosecutor and the town officials apologized for their actions. Judge Hayes said, ""We cannot rewrite history, but we can right history."

We cannot rewrite the ways we have let our hostilities impact the lives of others...but we can right the wrongs by moving forward toward peace. We can embrace the truth that Christ is our peace and through him, the dividing wall of hostility can be removed.

Whether it is someone's race, ethnicity, legal status, or voter registration card...we are not enemies...diversity is not an excuse for hostility. There is a better way...Christ is the better way...and we are called to take that path and find peace in the purple.