

Rev. Beth J. Costlow

8th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 16/Proper 11

Ephesians 2:11-22

July 18, 2021

Prepared for: Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

- Aunt Dorothy
 - My father's aunt, my great-aunt, lived in NYC and visited family in upstate NY only infrequently
 - Smelled like a combination of Ben Gay, baby powder, and Jean Naté
 - She was a cheek-pincher and a harsh critic, of the "children are to be seen and not heard" mindset
 - All of which, of course, added up to the fact that neither my siblings nor I liked her very much.
 - Background: My parent's divorced when I was five years old, and their divorce was contentious.
 - Most of our contact with Dad's extended family, then, came through Dad.
 - Not so with Aunt Dorothy. She'd call directly to my mom and tell her that she was coming.
 - Mom always welcomed her.
 - Aunt Dorothy died before I became a teenager, and it wasn't until I was well into my thirties that I learned that my mom disliked her nearly as much as we children did.
 - "Why did you let her come visit, then?"
 - "Because she was family!"
 - That, friends, is the gospel in action. Aunt Dorothy wasn't technically part Mom's family anymore. And she wasn't even a well-loved member of her ex's family. But she was still family, so she was included.
- Why am I telling you that story?
 - Obviously, it's not because of how much I loved and treasured Aunt Dorothy.
 - "Remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth....remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once 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." (Ephesians 2:11-14)
- Let's pretend we're Lutheran for a minute, and return to the question Martin Luther used so often in his *Small Catechism*: What does this mean?
 - The author of the letter to the Ephesians explains for us!

- “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.”
- Jesus has broken down the walls that once divided Israelites and Gentiles.
 - Jesus has broken down the walls that might divide Christians from one another.
 - Jesus has broken down the walls that might divide nations from one another.
 - Jesus has broken down the walls that—wait for it—might separate Democrats and Republicans, or Conservatives and Progressives from another!
- “He 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.”
 - First, that word “abolished.”
 - Greek: “to render inoperative” or “to render all power from”
 - In other words: The Law still exists and followers of Jesus are not exempt from the commandments.
 - BUT—and this is big—obedience isn’t the basis for salvation!
- And right there is the Good News!
 - Christians may not be divided from Israelites, but we’re certainly divided from one another.
 - Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Lutherans
 - Even within some of those traditions—including our own!
 - Those walls that divide nations, broken down by Jesus?
 - They exist around the world. We have American citizens advocating completing one at our own border.
 - Even in my own family. Probably in yours, too.
 - Mom included Aunt Dorothy, but not her children’s own father.
 - And let’s not forget the political division in the US and elsewhere!
- Let me repeat: “He 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 this: Obedience is not the basis for salvation.
 - More accurately, our obedience is not the basis for our salvation.
 - Jesus’ obedience already fulfilled eternity for us.
- “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints, and also members of the household of God.”
 - You are a member of God’s household. Rejoice! Amen.