

*Texts: Psalm 133; Eph. 2:11-18; Mark 6:53-56*

*Subject: Good News for the Messed Up Relationship*

*Theme: Good News for the Messed Up Relationship: Made Into One*

*Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 19, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven, and our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My brother Josh and I are 30 months apart in age. We shared a bedroom until I left for college. We grew up laying baseball in the street, building forts, camping in the backyard, and spending summers with our grandparents together. As we got older, we both played little league, were on the same wrestling team, and had many friends in common. I went to Florida State University. He joined the Marines, and then went to Florida State University. It might sound like we have a lot in common. But we are different in so many ways. He was almost always bigger than me. A better athlete. Much better looking, and far less geeky than I was in my teens. We fought a lot growing up. By the time I got a driver's license, I was gone most of the time, working, or hanging out with my friends. We still spent time together on occasion, but not much. Today, he lives in Florida with his wife and three beautiful kids. He's an attorney and running for county judge. We are on different sides of most political issues. We don't talk to each other. I take the blame. I could have been the one to reach out more often. The distance between us has seemed at times too far to cross.

I love my brother. I'm proud of him, even though I don't agree with him on most things. I wish we could live nearby and hang out and raise our children together. It hurts not to have a closer relationship. It's possible that time will bring us together. But I know that no matter what happens, he will always be my brother - the closest human relationship in my life for at least the first decade and a half.

Maybe I'm not alone. Maybe you have someone in your family who has been far away, estranged, or a relationship that has been stretched thin, or that seems broken beyond repair. I have never liked the idea of writing people out of my life. I believe that we are bound together, not just by the experiences of our lives, by blood, or by some other tribal identity, but by the love of God.

The letter to the Ephesians is one that is deeply loved in Lutheran circles, and this second chapter begins with an emphasis on God's grace in such a clear and powerful way that we still use these words as we proclaim forgiveness in our weekly worship: "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved" We were dead. God graciously gave us new life. The author goes on, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and 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" (Eph. 2:8-10). We are what God has made us - I think we need to be reminded of that sometimes. It's easy to think I am who I made myself to be, or who my family of origin made me to be. It's much more comfortable to think of myself as the result of my education, my work, my good deeds, and my well meaning words. I am who God made me to be. That can be a great blessing , and a big responsibility.

Paul - or the author of this letter, maybe a disciple of Paul - is writing to a people who were not Jewish. They had no part in the promises of a savior, and were outsiders. These Gentiles, were known as sinners, not that they were particularly awful or immoral,

though maybe some thought that way. They did not hold to the law of Israel, that wasn't for them, so they were not included in the covenantal promises the history, or the family lineage of those who could trace their heritage to the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel. What hope could they have for the future? All that they could do was strive to work for riches or power as a legacy. If that's all there was, nothing else mattered. Not family, not love, not service. All that matters is what you can get. It made no difference who paid the cost, or who got crushed under the wheel of climbing a social ladder.

Some people think that way today. Whether they believe it or not, they act as if there is nothing else to live for other than what they can do or build or earn. Even Christians are not immune from thinking they are better than everyone else. Shocking, right?

Today is Juneteenth, now a federal holiday. This is a day dedicated to service, and a celebration of freedom. To be more specific, it is the remembrance of the day the Emancipation Proclamation - *two and a half years after it was enacted* - on June 19th, 1865 was announced and enforced, with the arrival of over 2000 federal troops and with great effort in Texas, and in Galveston in particular, where it was not well received. A week before, Texas governor Pendleton Murray fled to Mexico with other confederate leaders. Some white landowners took to executing their enslaved workforce rather than acknowledging their freedom. Eventually the day would become a day of rejoicing for the black community, and was first declared a state holiday in Texas in 1980.

But still today, it's not all barbecues and backyard parties. Our nation continues to find itself tangled in the threads of racism and oppression that have bound us for the

last four hundred years. People of color are still dying at the hands of white supremacists, and divisions persist even here in our city. We wonder how to mend the messed up relationships and systems exist in the twenty-first century. Many of us have pledged to acknowledge privilege and systemic oppression, and to take actions toward celebrating diversity in our churches and in our communities. We can do more. We must see each other with the eyes of God, to acknowledge that we are **one new humanity** in Jesus Christ. We don't get saved by our works, but we're made for them. We're made for relationships that build up, that bring healing, that celebrate the beauty of the world and the people that God loves so well.

God's grace has come to every single one of us, to all of us through the cross of Christ, who loved us even when we were dead and without hope. God included even those from outside the chosen people, God's beloved Israel, to be gathered in God's mercy. Even when we are estranged or at odds, upset with each other, or stuck in anger and unable to move forward, we are one people of God, united in Christ Jesus. We are one church, confessing our sin, asking for forgiveness, and approaching the table together. We are who God made us to be. We are brothers and sisters - Jesus' chosen siblings.

Since God has put to death the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, every division we face is overcome by God's grace. The peace that God brings is the peace is belongs to all of us. We are freed from sin and death. We are freed for love and service. We are freed for healed relationships, new vision, reconciled people and communities, to work toward safety and access and for all.

I think what I've had to learn over the years is that I can't fix all the messed up relationships in my life. I can love people the best I can, I can be as patient as possible, and try to handle myself in a way that is kind and fair, and I'll still mess things up at times. But I know it's not all up to me. God has gone further than I ever could to mend the whole world, bringing new life for every one of us graciously through the cross of Christ. We were all outsiders, all without hope or a chance at being freed from the selfishness that clings to us and the hurts that we cause, the guilt that we carry. We had nothing, but God did everything. God brought us together, knit us into one people, grafted us all into the vine of Israel and made us alive together with Christ, not because of our great deeds or righteousness, or our beautiful singing voices, or the large checks we write, or our good looking faces and trim bodies - nope. God loves us all just as we are. Messed up, for sure. Afraid at times, frustrated, worn out, anxious, neurotic, hypocritical, judgmental, sick, and stinking sinners that we are - we are still forgiven and gracefully welcomed into the family through the one that has liberated us all with his own body and blood.

Amen.