

One Community
July 10, 2005

I am really a positive person. However, sometimes I think that we live in a day and age, in which every event propels the world into even greater risk and polarization. Such an event as this week's London Bombing further feeds the dialogue that separates people. The fear that is bred by such terrorist actions simply arouses more hatred and expands the wide chasm. As if the war in Iraq had not already strained relations between East and West...even between people in this country! As if the Group of Eight Summit in Scotland hadn't already become a cartoon depicting elite, rich nations sitting in judgment over poverty in Africa! We spend billions on military matters; can these nations so mighty and powerful figure out a way to deliver aid, resources and relief to the most needy? I could certainly go on, but that's not what you want to listen to!

In turn, one might ask where are the visionaries who can bring about the unity that our world so dearly needs. One can ask where are the prophetic voices that might raise the issue of global harmony in a way that stirs people's hearts and minds so that reconciliation is sought and peace truly achieved. Who will rise up to lead us past these hurtful, painful divisions?

In such moments of my negativity, I have an even greater appreciation for those passages in Scripture that point us in the direction of peace and global harmony. Not only the words, but the incredible enthusiasm and purpose with which those words are spoken! When you think of what Peter, Paul and the early Christian community and what they were up against, their determination is inspirational. Their commitment to achieving the goal of peace and reconciliation (through love) remains a standard for us in every way!

Ephesians 2: 14-22 is one of the passages that inspired the writing of the hymn that we are in the middle of, "Called as Partners in Christ's Service." Ralph Martin in the Interpretation Series of Bible Studies describes the verses as among the "most timely" for our day and age. I have to agree. In his appeal to the reader, Paul spells out two very significant things here. First of all, Paul explains how a dividing wall, otherwise endless and totally imposing, has been torn down through Christ's death and resurrection. Second, he commissions each person to continue the struggle that seeks to declare our unity before God.

The key to understanding everything is verse 17. Very simply I quote: "So he (Jesus) came to proclaim peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near." Now you might suppose that he is here referring to a matter of distance. But that is not the case! Rather, Paul is speaking of Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were those considered close (or near) to God because they had the law. The Gentiles were all other people, thought to be far from the truth, because they did not accept or had not been introduced to Jewish Canon.

Listen to some of what Paul says to these two factions- one near, the other far. "Jesus has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, the hostility between us." "Jesus has created one new humanity in place of two." "So you are no longer strangers and aliens, but also members of the household of God." How we wish that someone would remind us (with clarity) of what Jesus came and did - that he

down the dividing wall! Not just then, but for all time! We need to continue to overcome similar divisions in order to discover God's mandate, which is to become a new humanity!

I find it truly amazing that Paul not only says such a thing! Not only believes such a promise! But that he sets out to tell others that this is what being God's church in ministry is all about. As Ralph Martin goes on to explain, this is all critical to how we view our lives. If we (Jew and Gentile) understand that our ultimate purpose is to find unity (equally) before the one God, then it should follow that we become reconciled to one another in a way that overcomes "religious and cultural divides." "Cultures and classes that had once been separated by walls of prejudice and tradition are now opened to one another, and lines of connection and conversation are established."

You can probably sense where this is going. Today we say farewell and God Bless You to the Z Team that travels this week to Zimbabwe. The trip has been a long time in the making. It is a small scene in the total scheme of the play. Yet, a major effort here in Wakefield and a reminder of Paul's commission to the church - that the dividing wall has been broken by Christ; you are no longer strangers and aliens; there is one new humanity.

How can we achieve such harmony - such unity and understanding - unless we reach out in Christian love, building bridges instead of the walls that continue to constrict us - built as they are by bricks of warfare, hostility, discrimination and fear. Unless we embrace the words of Paul with the same energy and purpose that he did. There are always those who wonder why we leave our local township to travel halfway around the earth to seek unity. Isn't there enough need for that here, some ask? Well, look again to Paul and the disciples, whose vision was to travel to the corners of the earth in order to fulfill the prophetic call- that all should be made one before God! There is, in fact, no other way!

Paul was unequivocal about the need to love unconditionally. He would not compromise concerning the matter of Christ's coming - "In him the whole structure is now joined together and growing into the Holy Temple.. .into the dwelling place of God." How steadfastly we are called to believe this today, that we might hunger to see the Holy Temple that God calls us all into.

Z Team, we applaud your determination to travel to Zimbabwe. You are a powerful example of what it means to bear the cross of Christian Love. Bring the greetings of our church, whose support and love you have, to those far away. . . that we might strengthen the foundation... of which Christ is the cornerstone. Help us discover what is common between us; help us to recognize that distances can be spanned by faithfulness and differences can be overcome by love and respect. Go with our prayers for your safety. Go as the church that claims that all is made new and that all is made one before God. Amen.