

Order of Service 10.00 a.m.

WELCOME:

SENTENCES AND CALL:

PRAYER (Invocation):

PRAISE: 600 Sing to God new songs of worship

OT READING: Psalm 133 (page 625)

CHILDREN'S ADDRESS: 'We are all bricks in God's House'

PRAISE: 225 He's got the whole world in His hands

PRAYER (Confession and thanks):

NT READING: Ephesians 2: 11-22 (page 1174)

PRAISE: 54 Bind us together Lord

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

PRAYER (Intercession):

PRAISE: 673 There is a Redeemer

SERMON: 'Unity- Christ removes the barriers.'

OFFERING AND DEDICATION:

PRAISE: 442 Lord of the church we pray for our renewing

BENEDICTION: The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; be with us all evermore.

Call:

“We are all sons of God, through faith in Jesus Christ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ.”

Invocation:

Almighty God we praise you for your greatness and for your unfailing love. We praise you that your ways are beyond our ways, that your plans are perfect and that only you can see the beginning from the end. Yet we thank you for revealing to us the mystery of your will for this world, that in Christ all things in heaven and on earth may be united into one family forever.

So send us your Spirit to help us in our worship this morning. May he move among us, breaking down the walls that threaten to alienate us. May He use this service to create in us a deeper reality of that glue of love which binds us together in our shared experience of Christ. In His name we ask it, Amen.

Thanksgiving and confession:

For the hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,
Father forgive us.

For the covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,
Father forgive us.

For the greed which exploits the labours of others and lays waste the earth,
Father forgive us.

For our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
Father forgive us.

For our indifference to the plight of the homeless and the refugee,
Father forgive us.

For the pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,
Father forgive us

For your promise that when we confess our sins you forgive us completely,
Father we give you thanks.

For sending your Son to die for our sins that we might be made your friends,
Father we give you thanks.

For the reality that by His death and resurrection Christ has smashed the barriers that separate us from each other.
Father we give you thanks.

For giving us equal access to your presence in Christ and showing us an equal welcome in the family of the Church.
Father we give you thanks.

For our rich diversity that makes our life and worship together so much more interesting and challenging,
Father we give you thanks.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Intercession:

Gracious Father, we pray for peace in our world: for all national leaders that they may have wisdom to know and courage to do what is right; for all people that their hearts may be turned to you in the search for righteousness and truth. For those who are working to improve international relationships that they may find the true way of reconciliation, for those who suffer as a result of war; the injured and disabled, the mentally distressed, the homeless and the hungry, those who mourn for their dead and especially for all who are without hope or friend- sustain them in their grief.

Make us worthy to serve our fellow human beings throughout the world, who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day their daily bread and by our understanding love give peace and joy. These prayers we offer in the name of the Prince of peace who teaches us to pray as one family saying:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever, AMEN.

Offering:

Father as we bring our offerings help us always to remember that for them to be acceptable to you we must also bring you lives that our at peace with each other. So help us to strive for that unity that enables you to accept all other offerings in our lives. In Jesus name we ask it, Amen.

God the Builder

Intro:

What is a church?

Illustration:

Lego blocks with stickers on them. Children write their names on the stickers and build them together into a church/wall.

Teaching Point:

In the bible the word church is used to describe a group of people who love Jesus and who join together to worship Him (sing to Him, talk to Him in prayer and listen to the bible). They also work together to tell other people about Jesus' love so that they can come and join in the church. They also work together to practically help other people who are suffering in the world.

When you were baptised as a baby you became part of God's church. Even though we're all very different God loves us all the same and accepts us all the same. What's more we are all equally important. God needs us all to work together to be His church. Doesn't matter if you sing, or read, or are good at answering questions, or good at teaching or good at being kind you are all special to God and have an important place in the church.

You are a special part of this church, just as important as the minister or anyone else. We love to see you coming every Sunday and we hope you enjoy learning about God. Look after each other, love each other and never think you are more special than anyone else.

Unity – Christ removes the barriers

Intro:

Paddy and Seamus were having one of their deep and meaningful discussions about the discoveries of the scientific world. “So Paddy, what do you reckon is the world’s greatest invention?” “It’s got to be the thermos flask”. “The thermos flask? Why’s that then Paddy?”

“Well, when you think about it Seamus- it keeps hot things hot and cold things cold, but how does it know?”

1 The Mystery of the Gospel:

Life is full of mysteries. Things that we don’t quite understand, that have never been explained to us by an expert in the subject. Paul talks about the mystery of the gospel Paul understood the work of Christ in terms of revelation and the bringing of knowledge. In Colossians 2 he says, “*Christ is God’s mystery*” and in Ephesians 1 he says “*God made known to us the mystery of His will... which He purposed in Christ*”

Interestingly the Greek word Paul uses ‘mysterion’ does not refer to something that is difficult to understand but something which is a secret. But if the secret is revealed it is easy to understand. The word was used in the Greek mystery religions where before the elaborate service of initiation with special rites and symbolism the candidate was instructed in the meaning of all these things-these mysteries. To an outsider they would have seemed strange, bazaar, but to the one instructed they had a deep and spiritual meaning. To some extent it would be similar to someone with no Christian background observing one of our communion services without explanation. It is a mystery. But when the symbolism of the bread and the wine is explained it becomes extremely special and meaningful to those who partake. So Paul says that in Christ the mystery of God’s will is revealed. It is a revelation of new knowledge never before fully revealed or completely understood.

So what is this mystery of God’s will revealed to us in Christ? Paul tells us in a number of places particularly here in Ephesians and in Colossians. In Ephesians he says, that the mystery of God’s will is “*...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*” In Colossians, Paul says that his desire for the Christians there and in Laodicea is “*that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ.*” And earlier in Colossians he explains God’s purpose in sending Christ when he writes, “*For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things on earth or in heaven by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.*” So Paul reveals the mystery that had never been fully understood before that God’s purpose in sending Christ is that all things and all people could be reconciled to God and be reconciled to each other.

That’s why the cross is such an important Christian symbol. It is a constant reminder of God’s purpose for His world- that in Christ all people may become God’s friends and in so doing they also become friends of one another. As we approach our week of

Christian unity may we never forget that God's purpose is not just about sorting out my relationship with Him but about having good relationships with one another.

2 The Mess of the world:

But why is God's purpose so necessary? Why did Christ really need to come? Well the simple answer is because the world is in such a mess. We only have to read the papers to see that the world is a pretty messed up place. The reason that it's messed up is because basically we are all carrying a deadly virus. It's not aids or bird flu it's sin. Like measles, the problem within expresses itself on the outside. So we shade the truth, we over indulge, we say things we regret, we ignore those around us who are struggling. Above all sin manifests itself in our desire to live life the way we want without paying much heed to the way Christ wants us to live. Of course, many of us do lots of things that are good, there are a lot of really decent people out there. The problem is, all those good things are like covering our measles spots with sticking plasters. It's not getting to the root of the problem in our bloodstream. Worst of all by our sin we have offended God and we find that we are estranged from him. In reality we are God's enemies rather His friends.

But not only has sin messed up our relationship with God but it has alienated us from each other. Historically there have always been barriers between people. Here in Ephesians Paul talks of the barriers between Jew and Gentile. Speaking of the Gentiles before Christ came he says, *"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world."*

The Jews had been God's covenant people. God had chosen them out of all nations and made an agreement or covenant with them. He had agreed to bless them and provide them with a homeland. In return, the Israelites agreed to obey Him and live in such a way as to bring honour to God's name on earth. Other nations could then see God's glory and even share in this by becoming a Jew. God didn't choose the Israelites because they were better than anyone else, no, He chose them for a special responsibility- to reveal His glory to the rest of the world. He didn't choose them because they were better than Gentiles or non-Jews, no, He chose them because it was necessary for His overall plan for the world to be worked out.

Unfortunately their privileged position made many Jews wrongly proud. They began to think of themselves as better than the Gentiles and adopted sectarian views. These appeared in their literature. Ironically, echoing the atrocities of the holocaust one ancient Jewish saying was "Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell." This racial hatred also manifested itself in their relationships. If a Jew married a Gentile then the Jewish family carried out a funeral for the man or woman who had married outside their race.

The temple in Jerusalem was designed in such a way as to highlight the difference and separation between Jew and Gentile before Christ came.. It was surrounded by a series of courts and walls, similar to a series of squash courts in a leisure centre. The main difference was that the walls of each court were of different sizes. These walls were smaller in the outer courts but got progressively larger the closer you got to the inner temple. That meant that the temple was hidden from view from all but those

who were allowed in to the centre. The outermost court was the court of the Gentiles. Next to that was the court of women. Next to that was the court of the Israelites. Next to that was the court of the priests and in the centre was the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence into which only one person, the High Priest, could come. In one sense all of this separation was a very visible sign that God was Holy and that He was to be approached in the right way. Thus God also gave Israel an entire system of sacrifices to highlight the ugliness of sin and the need to approach Him with reverence and with a contrite heart. At this time in biblical history the only way for a Gentile to approach God was first of all to become a Jew. As such, Gentiles were confined to the very outer courts of the temple.

Unfortunately, however many Jews rather than loving Gentiles and wanting to see them come to an understanding and acceptance of Judaism simply despised them. Rather than explaining that the walls of the temple served a purpose of highlighting the need to approach God in reverence, they were viewed as a symbol of separation and superiority that could never be overcome.

In 1871 stone tablets were discovered embedded in the marble wall surrounding this court of the Gentiles. They were inscribed with these words, *"Let no-one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy place. Whosoever will be taken doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue."*

Maybe this shocks you, but really it shouldn't for after thousands of years nothing much has changed. Today in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools and colleges, in our sports clubs, in our towns, in our nation, in our world and sadly even in our churches we still build walls that divide and separate. Walls of race, class, colour and creed. We still have iron curtains, checkpoints and detention centres, we still see division between nation and nation, class and class, colour and colour, denomination and denomination. We are still in a mess- We are divided between ourselves because of our sinful pride. A virus from within expressing itself outwardly in our attitudes towards others who in some way are different from us. We forget that we are all created in the image of God. But God is not pleased with our pride and our prejudice. So there is within us all a double tragedy for we are by nature sinners and therefore estranged from God but also often at odds with each other.

3 The miracle of Christ:

So what hope is there for our messed up lives and for this messed up world? How can we ever be reconciled to God and truly reconciled to our brothers and sisters whatever their class, creed or colour? The answer is the miracle of Christ. Paul writes, *"For Christ Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which He put to death their hostility."*

Paul says that Christ is our peace- For a Jew the term peace means 'right relationship'. So here Paul is saying that Christ is the one who brings us into right relationship with God and with one another. The greatest tragedy in life is the situation where two

people drift apart until a gulf stretches between them which is very difficult to cross. It is like that with us and God. Our deliberate refusal to live God's ways creates a gulf between us and God that only Christ can cross. But through His death and resurrection Christ has built a bridge whereby our sins might be forgiven and our relationship with God restored. When we are truly sorry for our sin and trust in what Christ has done for us we move across that bridge and become reunited with our heavenly Father. God says to us in Christ, 'Be friends with me again.'

But how does Christ reconcile us to each other despite our obvious differences Jew with Gentile, black with white, rich with poor, male with female? Paul says that "*Christ smashes the walls that separate us by abolishing in His flesh the law and its commandments and regulations.*" You see Jews believed that it was only by keeping the Jewish laws that a person could be good and obtain friendship with God. The problem with this is that a religion of rules and regulations can never include everybody. But Jesus is the end of the law. He ended the legalistic keeping of minute regulations as a way of becoming God's friends and He replaced it with a new law, the law of love. Love for God and love for other people however different they are from us. You see, when two people are estranged very often discussions, rules, regulations and treaties can never bring about a true and lasting reconciliation. Often it is only when someone comes along who is mutually loved and respected by both parties that a reconciliation can emerge. So it is with people. It is only a common love for Christ that enables people with different cultures, traditions, backgrounds, likes and dislikes to live together in harmony.

There is a true story during the Second World war of two soldiers who brought the body of a colleague to a French cemetery to be buried. Sadly the resident Priest refused their request because their friend was not a baptised member of the Roman Catholic Church. So the two soldiers buried the body 6 feet outside the fence surrounding the cemetery. The next day they returned to pay their respects but to their astonishment they couldn't find the body. As they were about to leave in bewilderment the priest came up. He told them that his heart had been so troubled because of his refusal that he had risen early in the morning and with his own hands had moved the fence to include the body of the soldier who had died for France. That is what love can do. The rules and regulations put up the fence but love removed it. Jesus removed the fences between us. Fences of race, class, creed and colour. He has done this by abolishing religion that is based on rules and regulations, likes and dislikes, backgrounds and traditions and brought to us a religion whose foundation is love.

This is not to say that all our differences are eradicated. It's important that we are allowed to maintain our racial and national characteristics. It's inevitable that we will have different likes with regard to styles of dress, form of worship, types of music, or where we place our priorities in life. But if we are to take the name Christian upon our lips then we must remember that in Christ none of these differences matter. For we are all equally made in the image of God. We are all equally sinners and in need of a Saviour. We are all reconciled to God in the same way- not through anything we have done but by the grace of God. We all have equal access to God. No matter where we come from originally, in Christ and in this church none of us are strangers or foreigners. In Jesus we are all equally at home with God. There is a seat and place for everyone in the family of God.

Praise God we're not all alike! But may God help us not to use our differences to build fences that divide us. Remember that our love for Christ tears down the fences and enables us to truly love one another not just as equals but as brothers and sisters. And may God help us not only to be hearers but to be doers of His Word!