August 15/16, 2026
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Ephesians 2:13-22
Peace In Christ

As a sports fan growing up in Michigan and only 20 minutes from the campus of Michigan State University, I was naturally part of a heated sports rivalry. To say there's animosity between the fandoms of the Michigan State Spartans and the University of Michigan Wolverines is an understatement. I would say this rivalry is on par with, if not more heated than, the rivalry between the Packers and the Bears. Football is probably where things get most intense. On a given Saturday, even when the teams weren't playing each other, a Spartan fan such as myself was hoping the Wolverines would lose that day. The feeling was mutual for Wolverine fans. No peace whatsoever between these two groups, most especially on Saturdays, when it came to collegiate sports.

But, then, something interesting would happen just a day later. Where two people couldn't get along on a Saturday during the football season, Sunday brought unity. No, I'm not talking about church. I'm talking about the Detroit Lions. Spartan and Wolverine fans would trade in their team's shirts and other apparel for Lions fan gear. And, on Sunday, while watching the Lions play, there was peace between the two groups. Amazing what a type of mediator in that sense can do for two such opposing people.

Peace is what we're all yearning for in our own state, in our country, and across the world. Often, it takes an outside event or experience to establish peace, even if only momentarily. I think back to 9/11 and how that tragic event brought our country together for a time. When astronauts work together in space from various countries, there's a peace there that can seem so absent back on earth. Such outside factors bring two or more together in peace, even if just for a moment.

And, yet, there's a greater peace we're all yearning for, isn't there? It's a peace not found in this world. It can't even really be described as an emotion. As God describes it in the Bible for us, it's a **"peace which surpasses all understanding."** (Philippians 4:7) Such a relationship of peace with someone else, then, seems unattainable, too good to be true. But, it truly exists. And, it's offered to everyone, all because of someone outside of ourselves. As Paul puts it for us today, **"For (Christ) is our peace."** Yes, we all have peace in Christ.

Jesus was prophesied to be just that for the world. Remember what was said in the book of Isaiah? **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:11) And, then Jesus himself would say shortly before he would fulfill eternal peace for all, **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace."** (John 16:33) We have certain confidence that the ultimate peace we desire is found through faith in Christ.

The peace which Paul is ultimately driving at in our lesson is peace between two different groups of people. And, we'll dwell on that mostly today, but we cannot properly grasp what that means for our relationship with others unless we first recall the peace we have with our God in Christ. Paul himself teaches the peace with God in Christ when he writes that Christ's purpose was **"to reconcile both of them to God through the cross."** As a Christian, You have peace with God in Christ.

That peace is your sins forgiven. It's truly unfathomable the fear that we should have as we ought to cower in terror before the holy God. You remember the guilt and sickening feeling in your gut as parents called you to the privacy of their room to talk to you or when the principal's office called to have a word. That's nothing compared to what we deserve to experience before God because of our sins. What a wall of hostility that stood between us and God because of our sinfulness. No peace. Only terror. And, that terror produces enmity and hatred toward God in the sinful heart. Anything but peace with God.

Then, Christ entered in. He entered into the scene through the Father's promise in the Garden of Eden. He entered into this world as he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. And, then, he entered into your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Something outside yourself brought you peace, completely obliterating the wall of hostility that stood between you and God. No more terror. No more hatred. Only peace. How amazing a reality that you and God are now one. All because of Christ.

And, that changes everything for you. It changes your eternal destination. It changes how you endure challenges in this world. It changes how you view other people, especially those drastically different from you. Where there is drastic difference, you wouldn't expect peace. But, peace is there in Christ as well. **"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."**

The two groups Paul is talking about are Jew and Gentile. And, historically, they didn't get along at all. This was something much deeper than any sort of sports or political rivalry. The Jews looked down on the Gentiles because the Gentiles weren't God's chosen people of old. They didn't receive the Mosaic Law as the Jews had. The Jews felt superior due to these circumstances.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, despised the Jews because of how the Jews elevated themselves. At the same time, the Gentiles noticed that the very Law the Jews prided themselves in was a Law that was out of reach to obey. The Gentiles called the Jews out on their attempt to circumvent the Law at times, even though many pretended to hold it in such high esteem.

It wasn't so much the moral law that got in the way. After all, everyone has a conscience. Gentiles knew it was wrong to steal and to kill and to lie without having the specific commandments. Rather, it was the civil and the ceremonial laws that stood in the way as the dividing wall of hostility. Laws that were meant to keep Israel separate from other nations with the sole purpose of preserving the line of the Savior were still being used, improperly now, by the Jews to keep them separate from others they looked down upon. To the Jews, the Gentiles didn't "look the part" to be part of God's chosen people. As a result, the Gentiles wanted nothing to do with the Jews, even if they believed in Jesus. True peace among God's people seemed totally unattainable because the ancient laws were still being used to build a wall of hostility.

But, remember the outside factor? Christ entered in. And, what did he do? **"He has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."** Christ fulfilled all those ancient laws meant to keep Israel separate. They were no longer needed. Their purpose was obsolete. Now what mattered was what united the two groups, and that was Christ as Savior from sin. Whereas the law brought hostility, Christ brought peace.

The Jews were initially failing to see something deeper. They were too concerned with the outside, and they overlooked what was inside. The Gentiles weren't so different from the Jews. Each had a sinful nature and a need for the Savior. And, that need was met in Christ. There was now peace with God which meant there was also peace with each other. We can learn a lot from that and obey how God wants us to see others and what attitude he wants us to have when it comes to others who believe in Jesus even if they seem so different.

Let's consider, for a moment, how we can turn God's moral law, the 10 commandments, into a dividing wall of hostility. We can easily look down on others and don't think they belong. Let's say it was obvious to you that a visitor walking into St. Matthew's was a former drug dealer, or a former advocate for abortions, or someone who was known in the past for stealing or lying. It shouldn't define them any longer, but you can see it does, and that they still struggle a bit with those tendencies. Maybe you see someone here in church that you know from social media has totally opposing views from your own and they are very open with their opinions. Would you go out of your way to sit by these people or greet them after the service? Would you be silently questioning

if they should be here? Is that attitude not the result of a dividing wall of hostility that the sinful nature in our hearts can create using God's good moral law? Is there peace there with that individual?

There are a lot of wrong reasons to come to church such as: We're put together. Maybe we have on our Sunday best. I haven't done "those things" that others have. I deserve to be here. But, what if when you walked through St. Matthew's doors, a loudspeaker using AI technology made it known to all that one sin you don't want others knowing about? What if that one thought you had about someone else was displayed on the screens in the gathering space? Would others want to sit next to you, or would they question why you can even be here?

Do we deserve to come to God's house and be in His holy presence? Do we deserve to be grafted into God's family tree or built into his holy temple or have our names written in the book of life? Rather than asking that question of others, we ask it of ourselves and recall what we focused on in the first part of this sermon. By God's grace through faith in Jesus as my Savior, faith worked by the Holy Spirit, I am at peace with God. I don't deserve peace. But I have peace in Christ.

And, that's true for the person next to me who believes or maybe who's hearing that message for the first time. No matter what sin that individual has committed, there is peace in Christ, and such peace is received through faith which comes from hearing the gospel. Praise God that person is sitting next to me, hearing the Word we all need to hear. That truth is what brings peace with each other. Christ is the mediating factor which brings believers together despite their past, and often even their present sins; sins, though, that are forgiven in Christ.

Yes, public or private sins, outward appearance, political differences, worship style differences; there are so many things the devil will use to create in our hearts a dividing wall of hostility with others. But, Christ has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility. So, we have peace: both with God and with each other. Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's not so much what's on the outside. Someone who confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit, no matter who they are or what they've done, we have peace with them. God, help us have that attitude.

Keep Paul's closing words to us today constantly at the forefront of your heart. It helps remind you that you are at peace with God. It reminds you that many others are as well, even if they don't "look the part" because after all, none of us "look the part" if we dig deep enough. And, when we remember that truth, it helps us be at peace with all believers, no matter who they are. God be praised we are part of his body! We close by listening to Paul. **"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."** Amen.