

We bow our hearts in prayer: Lord, have mercy on all our families and on Your Church, strengthen the bonds of love, teaching us how to forgive one another and live in peace. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When God created man & woman, the very next thing He created was unity between man & wife by bringing her to him and instituting marriage.

Ever since the Fall, divisions have ravaged the married estate... and every other relationship, family and otherwise.

In Genesis 4, we read of the division between Cain and Abel, ending in murder.

In Genesis 6 we read that **the earth was filled with violence** Genesis 6:11

as Adam's descendants fought with each other until God flooded the world.

In Genesis 10 we read of Nimrod, a mighty man who founded 2 ruthless empires, Babylon and Assyria.

Though all in the world were family members, sons of Adam and then of Noah, still they warred against each other and killed each other.

What God had joined together in families, sin and man through sin, separates.

But God still works to unite. He has not forsaken the world to its own devices.

Otherwise we would have completely destroyed each other long ago.

Instead Jesus came to earth to bring peace and unity between God and man.

And where that unity exists, He brings peace and unity between man and man, as well; between man and wife, between parents and children, brothers and sisters, and so on.

But this unity wasn't won by a little baby in a manger, or a child adored by kings.

It was won by the blood and death of Jesus, to reconcile us with His perfect Father.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* ^(John 17:17)

One of the major themes of Ephesians is "unity," and that, especially in the Church.

You heard St. Paul bring up that idea in our text where, speaking of Jesus, he says,

who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall

and again, that Jesus **reconcile[d] us both to God in one body.**

Obviously, for Jesus to break down the dividing wall, there was a wall of separation already.

That, too, was reported in our text. The division was between the Jews and the Gentiles, or the Jews and the non-Jews.

This division was a carry over from the old covenant God made with the Israelites at Sinai.

There God commanded His people to be separate from the unbelieving world so that they would not drag His people into unbelief, despair and other shameful sin & vice. Something that identified them as separate was the covenant of circumcision.

In Genesis 17, God promised Abraham that through circumcision (we could call it an OT sacrament), Abraham and his children would be His people, and threatened that the son who was not circumcised would be “**cut off from his people; he has broken [the Lord’s] covenant.**”

The Gentiles weren’t given that covenant. They hadn’t had that access to God directly that Israel did.

St. Paul reminds them: **remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

He didn’t remind them in order to make them feel like second-class members of the Church, but to let them rejoice all the more in their connection to Christ now.

The covenant of circumcision lasted until Christ fulfilled it through His own circumcision, through his life of righteousness, and through His death and resurrection.

Since He had fulfilled that covenant and instituted the sacrament of Baptism, this division between those who were circumcised and those who weren’t, wasn’t valid in God’s Church. He says,

now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And yet, the division was deep. So deep, in fact, that there was name calling from those who boasted that they were circumcised, as if it gave them special or favored status before God. Our translation of that name in our text as “the uncircumcision” is actually a benign translation. The literal translation of the word is... much less charitable. (“Foreskin”)

Of course, St. Paul could not let this sinful division stand, and

neither would he let the uncircumcised Gentiles have doubt in their belonging to God’s family.

Just before our text, debunking any reason for boasting St. Paul wrote^[8 & 9]:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

That must have given the Gentile Christians in Ephesus such comfort, and was a great reminder to the Jewish Christians of God’s grace, completely outside of our works.

It is a reminder that Christians today also need, constantly, especially in our families.

Are there any families where rivalries don’t exist?

Where parents don’t have times when they feel more important than their children, or at least behave and speak in a manner that would give that impression?

When siblings (young or old) don’t squabble (even regressing to name calling) over who is best? Or who is favored more?

Where a husband doesn’t render his services to his wife and children with an air of superiority?

Where a wife’s services to her husband and children aren’t rendered with a feeling of servitude?

Where the services of parents or children aren’t received with ingratitude.

Our natural human pride affects more than just our family relationships.

It is also expressed in our church family.

Like the Ephesian Jews, we are prone to boasting in the grace that God has given to us,
as if it were something that we have earned or deserved.

To consider your longer time in the Church,

or your life-long Lutheran heritage, as something that demonstrates God's greater favor on you.

To look down on others whose fruits of faith don't appear as evident as yours.

Of course, there are also those who are prone to believe that such kinds of separation are valid,
as some of the Ephesian Gentiles did.

Your guilt over your past sins, your struggles and failures with current temptations,
your newness to the Christian faith and Lutheran heritage may make you feel less a part
of Christ's family, the Church.

But such thoughts only build up a wall between God's own people,
and help us to justify our sins against our immediate family and church family.

It makes a division among us that Jesus Himself **has broken down in His flesh,
the dividing wall of hostility...**

But He came so that **He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two.**

His complete sacrifice on the cross was no less for children than for adults.

It is no more for life-long Christians than it is for new members of the Church.

It is for those prone to boasting and those prone to depression and despair.

He died to not only to break down the divisions among ourselves, our fellow man,

but even greater and more important, to break down the division of sin between God and us.

God is still, even and especially after the Fall into sin, in the uniting business.

He proves this to you as you live in your Baptism by continual repentance & receiving absolution.

He proves it to you as He unites Himself to you again and again in the Holy Communion,

by which He lets you partake of the **one body** (of Jesus) **through which He reconciled us to God.**

And not only does He give Himself to you, but also to your fellow **saints**

and members of the household of God^{Ephesians2:19} as they also commune

(that is "become one with") God and one with you.

Your brothers & sisters, fathers & mothers & children in the faith were all separated from Christ
by their own sin, just as you were.

And they were all **by grace... brought near by the blood of Christ... through faith,**
just as you were... **so that no one may boast** or despair.

...

Some say that blood is thicker than water.

But in the Christian Church, where water and God's Word washed us in Christ's blood,
and Jesus' blood was given and shed for many for the remission of our sins,

such a distinction only separates. We are all family. Family by the blood of Another.

Thanks be to God. *Amen*

Soli Deo Gloria