

## BUILT BY JESUS

Ephesians 2:11-22 [MW19-23]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 03 November 2019

Do you know what colour your eyes are?

- good  
all those with blue eyes raise your hands, thank you  
all those with brown eyes raise your hands, thank you
- those with grey or green or some other coloured eyes raise your hands, thank you  
you can be grouped with those who have blue eyes

Now I'm going to do a little exercise, and please it is just an exercise

- all you people with brown eyes like me, I have good news  
we are God's chosen people  
we are the ones God has blessed
- we brown-eyed people are precious and special in God's sight  
rejoice in that, celebrate it, enjoy this favoured position

Which means all you blue-eyed and other coloured eyed people

- I have some bad news for you  
you are on the outer
- God is not favourably disposed towards you  
I am really sorry but you are excluded from God's promises
- we, the brown-eyed, the true people of God  
must keep ourselves separate from you  
so really you others should be out there in the lounge, and the doors shut ...

And even if you non brown-eyed people have laser surgery

- or wear contacts to change your eye colour  
you still won't be like us  
you still won't really become one of the people of God
- I'm sorry but that's just how it is ...

Whew! That's just an exercise, it's not real

- because God loves everyone, draws near to everyone  
no matter what colour their eyes  
as we will see
- however it does give an insight as to how things were between Jews and Gentiles  
the Jews saw themselves in a favoured position as the people of God  
all others were second best, or worse

In the early Christian church Jewish Christians wanted to call the shots

- some said you had to go through the rituals to become a Jew  
before you could be a Christian
- there was animosity between Jews and Christians  
between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians

It was a big deal, a really big deal back then

- so much so that Paul addresses the situation head on  
he says to the Gentiles, once you were on the outer, far away  
not included in the promises, living without hope and without God

But that is not how it is now!!!

Then Paul tells the Jews straight up, that peace has been made

- the barrier has been removed  
this was a metaphor for people being separate  
being kept away or keeping others away ... at arm's length ... or further
- but it could also have had a literal meaning

Some commentators believe that Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter

- his 'crime'? bringing a Gentile into the Jerusalem Temple  
like saying to a blue-eyed person you can come this far and no further  
or else
- going beyond a particular dividing point in the Temple  
was such an important breach of Jewish law  
that the Romans allowed Jewish leaders to execute those who violated it

I don't know whether Paul deliberately pushed the boundaries

- but it sounds like something Paul might do  
in order to highlight this "dividing wall" which might still be in the Temple
- but actually, you know what says Paul, in reality it is no longer there

Ephesians 2:14 talks about a dividing wall of hostility, a wall of hatred

- Paul says this wall has been smashed, shattered, obliterated by Jesus  
how? on the cross
- Jesus pouring out his life's blood, offering himself completely  
completely destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile

Even more, Jesus' death on the cross made peace between God and people

- between God and all people  
and made peace among humanity, peace between all people
- those who were far away have been brought near  
those who were once alienated and enemies are united in the same family

Now obviously this is not quite fully realised

- Paul is in prison  
there are serious arguments between Jewish and Gentile Christians
- there are strong disagreements between different groups of Christians  
yes, even right back there at the beginning
- however Paul is highlighting what is unique about those who follow Jesus  
what is different and distinctive about this new community: "the church"

This message is just as important to us today

- because in many ways it appears we still haven't heard it  
groups of Christians who disagree treat each other badly  
with contempt and scorn
- some put others down while holding themselves up as the true believers  
sometimes there is violence and bloodshed

Yet today we are reminded that there is something refreshingly different

- about this new community of Christians

It came into being at such great cost

- and yet is offered so graciously  
brown-eyed, blue-eyed, any colour and no colour eyed, no eyed even  
are all drawn together, encircled and embraced in love

We've just embarked on a new Bible Study series called "Christian Community"

- here are some words from the introduction

The Bible describes a revolutionary community designed for any society, any age. It offers the blueprint for a spiritual kingdom where the King's subjects are loved, nurtured and protected. In this kingdom, everyone has distinct gifts, yet differences bring people together. Anyone can be included, and no one is expendable ... as the Father adopts us into his household, he introduces us to a wonderful extended family of brothers and sisters. The members of this family, like little children make mistakes from time to time. They have quarrels, dishonour the family and disappoint their Father. Yet at other times they perform miracles. Ultimately they constitute the most wonderful family we can ever claim. This is Christian community.

Ephesians 2:19 says:

*You Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners.*

*You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God.*

This is what makes the church unique - everybody belongs, whether they know it or not

- we are most definitely not all the same, we do not all agree  
but those disagreements and differences do not keep us apart
- Jesus removed the barriers  
so we can recognise each other as daughters and sons of God  
Jesus also removed the barrier between those inside and outside the church
- I read an article about this and wrote two quotes  
I'm sorry but I didn't note the author or the book, but the quotes are great

This is the first: referring to those beyond the church doors the author wrote:

This is their home, even if they have never been here before (repeat)

And what is this "home"?

- I don't think I could describe it better than Paul in Ephesians 2:20-22

*God is building a home. He's using us all - irrespective of how we got here - in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day - a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.*

We are all living stones

- held together by Jesus and providing a dwelling place for God's Holy Spirit - wow!  
and this building, Paul tells us, has the apostles and prophets as the foundation

Today we are marking "All Saints' Day"

- and in the context of this, and of that reading from Ephesians  
we could see our presence here today built on those who have gone before us
- there are those who have provided a foundation for our individual life  
and there are those who have provided the foundation for the church community  
here in Mangawhai/Wellsford
- they are the saints  
so let us pause and give thanks for those who have gone on before us  
providing the foundation on which we are able to build
- the saints in the worldwide church, the saints in this place

[moment of silence]

For their faith and their contribution, we give thanks

And to conclude, a true story from the childhood of actor Dick Crenna who grew up in a hotel catering for the “less fortunate” – I'll leave it to you to work out who the saints are:

Mum was a mother figure to all our seventy-two guests, though she made sure none of the bookies or gamblers plied their trade in the hotel. In my young mind I disdained these people as has-beens and losers. And I often took advantage of their foibles. The Germ Man had a phobia about bacteria and always wore a face mask. When meeting him on the stairs, I'd take great delight in sneezing as loudly as I could and as many times as possible. He'd bolt madly for his room, and Mother would scold me for my unkind behavior ... I was being considered for a role in a radio series, and asked to go to New York City to audition. As a sixteen-year-old I was thrilled to be going all the way across the country ... But I wasn't expecting what happened before I left.

It was a surprise ... going-away party for me. I was stunned. Each resident had a gift for me. I had no idea that they actually cared. Mae Taylor presented me with monogrammed handkerchiefs in a fancy box. Tumbleweed, cold-sober for a change, handed me a pocketknife with all kinds of built-in tools. The World's Greatest Thief, his sky-blue eyes shining, gestured to the floor. There sat an expensive set of matched Hartmann leather luggage. I glanced at Mom apprehensively. But she smiled and pointed to the zippered canvas covers with my name stitched on them. The World's Greatest Thief had purchased this luggage - for me.

Even the Germ Man and the drunks I had relentlessly mimicked offered me their congratulations. I remembered my old priest saying that if you "bless those who curse you ... you shall be children of the Most High" (Luke 6:28-35). I hadn't actually cursed any of these people, but I certainly had made fun of them. And now they were paying me back with kindness and encouragement. Sad-eyed people in the lobby? Well, here I was, misty-eyed at their loving support. It was now clear: the men and women I had once written off as has-beens and weirdos were instead children of the Most High.

For the first time, I began to see that people are equal. And I understood Mother's compassion for former thieves, gamblers, and bookies: you love people for what they are, not for what you wish them to be.

Brown-eyed, blue-eyed, whatever colour it doesn't matter – all belong

The second quote I wrote is:

Our churches, like our homes and our lives, are not possessions to be protected,  
but gifts to be shared

Recognise it, believe it, live it

- we are to share our church, our home, our life  
to help one person who thought they were outside and beyond  
to be built by Jesus
- over the next month I encourage you to identify this person  
and to begin sharing this gift