



Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (July 21, 2024)

Did you notice if you have memory issues? Or simply forgetfulness, mindlessness? Do you get upset when you notice you don't remember things? What's your reaction like?

Today's segment from the letter to the Ephesians invites us to go back to the basics: "Remember" (Eph 2:11). Christians seem to have a memory problem.

In fact, the author of the letter reminds us that Redemption (aka reconciliation: see Eph 1:7) and adoption by God (Eph 1:5.11) is for both Jews and Gentiles alike, for the circumcised and the uncircumcised, equally and unconditionally. Both are worthy of God's unmerited grace. The "sign" of the covenant in the flesh¹ has been expanded by the seal of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).

Gentiles, the writer says, are "*aliens* from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope in the world" (Eph 2:12). Those who are "far off from God" are left to the tragic reality of searching for meaning and satisfaction in what is illusory and transitory.²

This describes alienation from God. The farther we get from God, who is Light, Beauty, Goodness, Justice, Righteousness, Joy, and Life, the more we experience darkness, ugliness, evil, injustice, corruption, terror, and death.

¹ Genesis 17:13

² Isaiah 55:2; Micah 6:14; Ecclesiastes 2:11; John 4:13-14

But thanks be to God for our salvation through Christ: though dead through our trespasses, we are made “alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:5).

God offers us rest and peace. Away from God we find emptiness and chaos. By going our way, we think we have achieved independence and power to choose. In reality, we have given up true power and have become enslaved to our idols.

Jews were called into the covenant first, *one* nation for the benefit of *all* nations. Their election served the purpose of saving the whole world.

Now the time of saving the whole world has arrived and those who were far off have been brought closer, or better, they have been brought “in” through the blood of Jesus Christ. He is our peace (v. 14 and 17). We are the “*others*,” the aliens God has blessed through God’s abundant grace.

We don’t hear he *brings* peace or *wants* us to have peace. He *is* our peace (vv. 14, 15, 17) and has made us one by breaking down the dividing wall of hostility.

The world has known real walls of division: the Hadrian’s Wall, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, Israel's wall around the West Bank and Gaza today, and so on.

Even between Jews and Gentiles there was a real and physical wall, the low stone wall that separated the outer court from inner court of the Jerusalem Temple to keep the Gentiles out.³

The dividing wall, the author of the epistle announces, has been brought down and we are “one new humanity” (v. 15). Gentiles are strangers and aliens no longer but “fellow citizens with the

³ Paul faced hostility after being wrongly accused of bringing a Gentile across this barrier (Acts 21:27–29).

saints and also members of the household of God” (v. 19) and together “a dwelling place for God” (v. 22).

Thanks to the salvific actions of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gentiles are made part of the resurrection story. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension have become theirs by believing in the Gospel. And that unity in, with, and through Christ in his Spirit gives access to the Father to both Jews and Gentiles.

There is an ethical implication, though. As adopted children of God, we are privileged to enter a relationship with God, and as such we are to accept, invite, include, and welcome others no matter their nationality, ethnicity, gender, and skin color.

New Testament professor, Frank Thielman, suggests that the primary orientation of Eph 2:1-10 is vertical, whereas our text for this week, 2:11-22, is horizontal. The first segment of Eph 2 is about God’s powerful work through Christ; the second segment is on the social alienation between Israel and the Gentiles and Christ’s role in solving this.

Some Christians believe that unity is achieved by imposing a strict view of Christianity on everyone in the nation, regardless of others’ religious views; that the Bible, rather than a democratic system, should set the nation’s laws; and that political violence may be necessary to save and protect America.

Adoption into God, instead, means living by God’s rules, by God’s holiness, by God’s vision and love, by God’s justice and righteousness. That is where God reigns.

We may not claim to be children of God and at the same time have no regard for others contrary to the way of Jesus. We may not claim to be made in God’s image if we deny and destroy the

image of God in others. We cannot have the same compassion of Jesus if we don't see others with the same eyes of Jesus.

Those who resort to verbal, physical, and political violence are certainly not following the meek and humble Jesus, who embraced and taught non-violence, and who instructed us to love and pray for our enemies. The Bible calls "antichrist" those who think, speak, act, and promote an ideology in conflict with Jesus' example.

When we criminalize the homeless; when we dehumanize the immigrants and refugees; when we restrict health services to satisfy our ideology; when we re-wright our history and ignore racial justice we are certainly not representing Jesus no matter how insistent we are in claiming to be a Christian Nation and no matter how loud we call, "Lord, Lord."⁴

Jesus our peace is not immune to conflict. Chapter 6 of Mark begins with the rejection of Jesus (vv. 1-6). His message is not one that pleases the comfortable. Those who feel challenged eventually respond with violence.

The disciples who extended Jesus' ministry of preaching, exorcism, and healing (6:7–13) have now returned. They turn in their mission reports – and he notices they are weary. The story of John's execution (6:14–29) reminds us of the danger still lurking on the political landscape. Getting away for a while, therefore, sounds like a good idea. The disciples need a break from their labor. Jesus needs time to grieve.

So, they go away "by themselves" by boat. They try to sneak out unobserved. But the suffering of the world is ever present.

⁴ Matthew 7:21-23

People swarm him and interrupt his retreat because they are both desperate and convinced that he could provide relief.

Jesus knows they are being denied well-being and justice, and the offense seizes Jesus. He shows compassion, and even though he must be exhausted, he listens to his heart and delays his rest.

In the face of human suffering, the natural response of the heart is compassion. The crisis confronting the world today is a lack of compassion and empathy. Political leaders throughout the world seek to outdo one another by demonstrating indifference to people's pain, toughness, intolerance, and cruelty.

Mark tells us: "He began to teach them many things" (v. 34). And then, when it became too late to send them home, he multiplied bread and fed over five thousand of them (vv. 35-44). Where does he find the stamina?

Mark does give us a clue about his immediate need. He says: "*Immediately* he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray." (vv. 45-46) Jesus is clear about self-care.

Soon after, he walks on water toward his disciples who try to manage a boat battered by heavy waves and calms a storm to his disciples' surprise (vv. 47-52). Once they make it to shore, they start the ministry all over again (vv. 53-56).

People raise to touch the fringe of his garment. They remember what God commanded in the book of Numbers:

"Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the

commandments of the Lord and do them and not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord your God.”⁵

People remember, and so they “beg him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touch it were healed” (v. 56).

Let us remember the Lord’s precepts.

Let us remember that we are the “others” God has reached out to and offered salvation.

And let us work towards the true unity of the children of God.
Amen.

⁵ Numbers 15:38-41