

Ephesians 2:11-22 — Jesus Gave Me a Family

February 9, 2014

Good morning. CrossWinds is a multicampus church that meets in Spirit Lake and in Spencer, plus we broadcast live on the Internet. If you are joining us through the Internet, we are glad to have you.

We are in a series called, “Who am I?” It is a study through the book of Ephesians. The book of Ephesians has stretched us. Last week we learned how sinful we are. We are spiritually dead. There is nothing we can do to fix ourselves or bring ourselves back into a relationship with God. When we want to shoot straight, we can’t. We are much more sinful than we thought we were. The amazing message is that even though we deserve God’s wrath for our sins, because of God’s love for us through Jesus, we have become the most blessed beings in the universe. We don’t deserve this. Through Jesus we get the exact opposite of what we deserve. Last week we learned that we are God’s masterpiece. We are his greatest work. God’s greatest work is not the creation and the universe, it is what God has done in you and me through Jesus. We deserve hell, but instead, through Jesus, we are the most blessed beings in the universe. We are God’s greatest work.

This morning, we pick up our study in Ephesians 2:11. We will learn that what Jesus has done for us doesn’t just bring us back to God, it restores our broken relationships with one another.

The outline of the text is straight forward. It is similar to one of those before and after pictures Jenny Craig advertisement. This is me before Jenny

Craig and this is me after Jenny Craig, 100pounds lighter. This morning our text talks about what we were like before Jesus came and before we were part of God's people. Next, it focuses on our lives after Jesus came and after we became part of his people.



Before Jesus came, we didn't have a relationship with God and were not part of his family.

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. Ephesians 2:11 (ESV)

In our world, there are plenty of divisions between people. In Rwanda you have the Hutus and the Tutsis killing each other because they are different. To my untrained eye, they look the same. In their eyes, they are so different they should kill each other. We saw this in World War II with Hitler and his superior Aryan race versus the rest of the world. We see it today with Republicans vs. Democrats, blue collar vs. white collar, seniors in high school who look down on the freshman, Okoboji vs. Spirit Lake.

People find others who are like them; they get in a group and then everybody else is the bad guy. We like putting ourselves in these little groups because it gives us a sense of identity. It makes us feel better about ourselves. The problem is that people in other groups do the same things. They call us the enemy. The next thing you know everybody is fighting somebody because they

think their group is better than another group. This is the source of most of the hurt, abuse and murder in the world. It all comes from sin.

One of the ugliest divisions between people in the ancient world was the hatred between the Jews and Gentiles. While God's intent for Israel was for it to be a light to the nations, in practice, it wasn't happening. The ancient historian Josephus tells us how the Jews thought about the Gentiles. Jews were taught that God created the Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. That is serious arrogance and neighbor hatred. The Jewish law didn't allow a Jew to aid a Gentile woman in giving birth. That would be helping to bring another heathen into the world. If a Jew and a Gentile were married, a funeral was conducted for the Jew and he or she was treated as if he or she were dead. The Jews were extremely arrogant when it came to their standing with God. They despised everyone else.

Paul started out by telling the Gentiles to remember who they were. This is the only verse that in the New Testament that tells us to remember who we were. Usually the Bible tells us to forget our pasts, but here we are told to remember.

He said to remember what people used to call them. They used to call them "the uncircumcision." I have heard a lot of name calling in my day but that is not one I have heard recently. If I did, I would find it mildly amusing and disturbing at the same time. In the ancient world the slang word, "uncircumcision" was a cut down. It was essentially a racial slur. It would be one of us calling a black person a nigger. It was condescending and stirred up hatred.

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant for the Jews. Calling people the uncircumcision was a way of saying “You are an outsider. You are a reject. You are bound for hell. No matter how much you love God, you are not part of his people.” This is not a nice thing to say.

There were five things he dug into they should remember about their “before Christ” photos.

You were separated from Christ.

...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ... Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

Do you remember what life was like before you were a Christian? For some of us, this is easier than others because you had a colorful past. Christ dramatically changed us. For others that grew up in the church, we do not have as much of a pre-Christ past to look back on.

Remember what it was like when you sinned but you had no hope of forgiveness. Remember what it was like when you were alone with just your thoughts and didn't know what it meant to pray. Remember what it was like when you lived in fear wondering if God loved you or how to find him if he existed. Remember what it was like where your identity was your grades in school or the size of your paycheck and if they didn't work out then you considered yourself worthless. Remember what it was like before you were a Christian. It was dark and hopeless.

You were alienated from Israel.

...alienated from the commonwealth of Israel... Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

Israel is the people of God. He said, “Do you remember what it was like when you were separated from God’s people?” Do you remember what it was like before you had a church? You didn’t have a Christian community to encourage you. You didn’t have people to pray with you. You didn’t have the chance to worship together. You were alone. You didn’t have Christian friends.

Sometimes we take the whole people-of-God thing for granted. We take it for granted that we have people in church this morning that we can connect with on a much deeper level than we can connect with others in the community. We are gifted by God to serve their needs and they are gifted by God to serve our needs. We have this incredible community called the church. Did you forget what it was like before you had your church family?

You were strangers to God’s promises.

...strangers to the covenants of promise... Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

God’s relationship with us is always defined by a covenant. A covenant is a promise. It is a promise that God will always be there. God did this with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He entered into a covenant with them. He promised King David that one of his descendants would rule Israel forever, that is Jesus. God kept his promise.

This is very similar to a marriage covenant. Marriage is not so much about attraction as much as it is a promise to give yourself into a relationship as husband and wife no matter what kind of rocky roads lie ahead, for better or worse, in sickness and in health.

All of God's covenants are summed up in Jesus. He is the ultimate promise of God. Think about God's promises to us in Jesus and imagine living without them. Jesus promises to forgive our sins. He promises to lead us, convict us and guide us with his Holy Spirit. He promises that when we die, we will be with God forever because of him. Imagine living without any of those promises from God that we can rest our hope in. You can be optimistic about the future but if you don't have God's promises for the future, you are just rearranging deck chairs on a sinking ship.

You were without hope.

...having no hope... Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

When I was studying this, these words stuck out to me. Remember when you were hopeless. That is harsh, but it is true. Apart from Jesus and what God has done for us through him, everyone's future is hopeless. We don't like to think about it that way, but it is true. Before Jesus, life was hopeless.

When you are sick and you have no hope of getting better, you just want to die. Many people are depressed today because they feel hopeless with rising costs but no rising salaries. It all leads to despair. Paul said that before Jesus, you could psych yourself into thinking everything would be fine but it was all a lie. Apart from Jesus, the entire world should be on Prozac. Apart from God, *there is no hope in this world.*

You were without God.

...without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

This line struck me. Not only were we hopeless, we were without God. Some of you wonder if this is true. Is it true that everyone outside of Jesus is apart from God? What about all the other religions of the world? What about all the people who don't go to church? The Bible is clear that apart from Jesus, people are without God. Paul said in Corinthians that the other gods people worship are actually demons, not the one true God who made the universe and his son, Jesus. We do not like to hear this. It is true. Everyone apart from Jesus is without hope for the future and without God in the world. This is really rough, but it is true.

Paul said, "You Gentiles who were getting mocked and made fun of, remember who you were before Jesus. You didn't have Jesus. You didn't have a church. You didn't have any promise for the future, You didn't have any hope. You didn't have God. Life was terrible before Jesus."

After Jesus came, he restored our relationships with God and made us his people.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13 (ESV)

You have to love the opening two words of this verse. We were hopeless and Godless. We were separated from God and his people, but Jesus changed all this. How did we get close to God? We didn't. Through Jesus, God got close to us and joined us to his people.

I tell you this all the time, but it is worth repeating because it is so easy to forget. All the other religions out there you have to find God and pay some kind of tax to get on his good side. You pay God to be your friend. The Bible says the

God of the universe is different. He hunted us down. He chose to love us when we were hopeless and we didn't know him. When we walked away, he brought us back. It is unbelievable that God would do this for us, but he did.

How did he bring us back? By Christ's blood. Christ died in our places for our sins. God connected himself to me by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus took away all our sins and Jesus gave me all his righteousness.

The point Paul was making was that Jesus' death on the cross didn't just reconcile us to God, but it reconciles us to one another.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... Ephesians 2:14 (ESV)

Jesus didn't just bring us back into a relationship with God but he brought us back into a relationship with one another.

Jesus is the only one who makes peace between all the warring factions in this world. He is the one who brings peace between the Republicans and the Democrats. He brings peace between the blacks and the whites. He brings peace between the rich and the poor. Jesus is the one who ends all the hostilities between people not by taking their differences away but by giving them an identity that is bigger than their differences, who they are through Jesus.

When God connects us to himself through Jesus, he automatically connects us to one another through Jesus.

Paul gave a great example here in the dividing wall of hostility. In that day, when you went to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, the temple was raised up. There were five steps you went up to one level, then there were another 14 steps up another level. On the top level was the holy of holies, the court of the men

and the court of the women.
All this was raised up in the
air for everyone to see. On
the ground there was a large
open area around the temple
called the courtyard. The
large courtyard had a 4 1/2



foot high stone fence around it called the dividing wall. If you were a Gentile, you could easily see over the wall to watch God's people in worship but you didn't dare join them. Over the gates hung signs saying that if you were a Gentile and you passed through the gate, they would kill you. How is that for being friendly? You walk across my backyard and I will shoot you, no questions asked. The Jews kept that promise. Talk about creating tension and hatred, that sign did it! So the Gentiles who loved God and wanted to worship God would come to the temple but they could only come as far as the parking lot. They couldn't even enter the building.

Imagine if we did this at CrossWinds. Only church members can use the building. Non-members need to stay in their cars in the parking lot and listen on the radio. By the way, the only way to become a member is to be born into the church. There are no membership classes. This is not a good deal. Can you see why there is so much tension between Jews and Gentiles?

Paul said that through Jesus, that wall that separates the Gentiles from being part of God's people is obliterated. There is not an in-group and out-group.

There is only one group — those who love Jesus. Paul's point is that once you have your new identity in Jesus, everything else that divides you from others doesn't matter anymore. There is no room for fighting between black Christians and white Christians, rich Christians or poor Christians, freshman Christians and seniors in high school. There is only one new people. Those who are in Christ. Jesus trumps every other division. *The Jesus that joins us is bigger than anything that divides us.*

...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...
Ephesians 2:15 (ESV)

Not only did Jesus abolish that huge wall that stopped Gentiles from joining God's people in worship on pain of death but he also abolished the Old Testament law which separated the Jews from everyone else.

What does it mean that Jesus abolished the Old Testament law? In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said he didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. How could Jesus say in Matthew that he didn't come to abolish the law but Paul in Ephesians said he came to abolish the law? It sounds like a contradiction. Here is the deal:

In the Old Testament, there were different types of laws.

Moral laws. These are laws such as: Do not kill.;do not commit adultery; honor your father and mother; love God; don't steal. They describe the inherent character of God. They are timeless laws. Jesus didn't come to abolish God's moral laws. Sorry kids, you don't get to dishonor your parents because Jesus abolished the law.

Civic laws. These laws pertain to how the nation of Israel was run as a country. They instructed the people to give a tithe of their income to the temple. These civic laws actually instructed multiple tithes. If you add it up, the people gave a little more than 30 percent of their income in tithes that covered the costs of the temple, a welfare system for helping the poor, paying the priests and all the governmental affairs of running the country. Remember the Old Testament nation of Israel was a theocracy. It was a nation run directly by God. We no longer live in a theocracy. We live in a democracy. We elect a president every four years. These civic laws no longer apply to us.

Ceremonial laws. These are laws dealing with worship and culture. They dealt with sacrifices and what sacrifices needed to be offered to cover sin. They dealt with the sacrifices of lambs on a daily basis and the sacrifice of a bull and goats on the Day of Atonement. Six years ago, we studied the book of Hebrews, and we learned that all these laws on sacrifices for sin no longer apply because all they did is point forward to Jesus. Jesus died once for all in our places for our sins. Jesus abolished those ceremonial laws.

The ceremonial laws were also laws dealing with Jewish culture. They were intended to make the Jews culturally distinct from everyone around them. These are laws that sound strange to us. They tell you not to eat fish from the bottom of the sea, so shrimp and lobster are off the menu. They tell you not to wear clothing of blended fabrics and not to cut off the side of your beard, so everyone looks like they belong on “Duck Dynasty,” and to dig a hole when you go to the bathroom. You read this and feel like a sinner because you go out for

dinner and have shrimp while wearing a cotton-polyester blend shirt and a fully shaven face. When you are done, you use the restroom instead of digging a hole in the winter. According to the Old Testament, you are quite a sinner for doing all of this. How do we put this puzzle together?

The moral laws are timeless. Jesus didn't come to abolish them. The civic laws don't apply to us because we don't live in a theocracy run by God but a pseudo democracy run by a president.

What about the ceremonial laws? When it comes to the laws on offering animal sacrifices for sin in the temple, they were taken away. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the holy of holies was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus gave us access to God through his blood. The whole sacrificial system for sin was abolished by Jesus.

In Ephesians, we learn the ceremonial laws that kept God's people culturally distinct were also abolished in Jesus. The laws about not wearing blended fabrics, not eating pork, not shaving your beard, the laws that kept God's people separate from main stream society are no longer in affect.

Before, you couldn't be friends with people of other cultures because you ate different foods, wore funky clothes, and looked like you came from "Duck Dynasty." But now, Christ didn't just reconcile you to God, he reconciled Christians to one another. Jesus trumps everything that keeps people apart. Remember that *the Jesus that joins us is bigger than anything that divides us*. We see Paul talking about this same issue with Peter in Galatians.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the

Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. Galatians 2:11–13 (ESV)

God's plan is not to make Gentiles into Jews. It is not to make Jews into Gentiles. It is to make a whole new race of people called Christians, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, where knowing Jesus is such a big deal that everything else that separates us apart is not a big deal.

God's plan is that Christians will be diverse in skin color, the nations they come from, the way they like their hamburgers cooked, the way they dress, the kind of music they listen to, their intellects, their backgrounds, and the sports teams they root for but they come together as one people in the church because *the Jesus that joins them is bigger than anything that divides them.*

Look what it is like in heaven. It is a complete multicultural worship service.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9–10 (ESV)

This is why Jesus puts in each church the rich and the poor, the Dutch and the non-Dutch, the black and the white, people from different towns and different ages and they all worship together and get along together and nobody else can understand why they hang out together because they really have nothing in common other than they love Jesus. *The reason is that Jesus that joins them is bigger than the differences that divide them.*

In modern Christianity, we see being a Christian as primarily individualistic. It is me and my Jesus. It is my personal relationship with Christ. That is only partially true. There is a corporate side to the Christian faith. Just as Jesus brings us back to God, in the church, he brings us back into relationship with one another. God's purpose is to knit us close to Jesus and as he does he will knit us close to one another.

God's purpose is always closeness of relationship. Sin produces separation and isolation. Jesus produces closeness and intimacy. He does this in marriage. God's purpose in marriage is to thrill us with intimacy. He created us for it. He also wants to thrill us with intimacy in the church.

The church is a family. When one of us hurts, the rest of us hurt. When one of us celebrates, the rest of us celebrate. When one of us is in financial need, the rest of us sacrifice. We are close in the church. That is part of what it means to be in the church.

...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:16–18 (ESV)

The picture is that no matter the hostility between us, as Christians, Jesus went to the cross to kill it. Christians of different age groups, worship styles, cultural backgrounds and economic statuses can get along and must get along, not because they don't have differences but because they both have Jesus and he is bigger than their differences. He killed the hostility between them on the cross. When we refer to other believers in derogatory terms, it doesn't show a problem with them, it shows a problem with us and that we don't understand

what Jesus has done for us and what it means to no longer be a Jew or a Gentile but to be a Christian. When God reconciles us to himself, he reconciles us to others he is bringing to himself. If you are on team Jesus, nothing else really matters.

Welcome to the family.

Paul gives us four applications and he does it in the form of metaphors.

The church is a family; eliminate the term outsiders.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints... Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

Everyone sees them after church. There are people in this building that are different from us. Maybe they are old and we are young. Maybe they are young and we are old. Maybe he or she has a nose ring. Maybe they have tattoos. There are plenty of people at CrossWinds that are different. You know the drill. Grab a coffee and smile at them. Talk a bit before you move back to your biological family and close friends.

Paul said this isn't the way we do things in the church. In church everyone is treated like family. Nobody is a stranger and an alien. Are you going to have lunch with your family today? Treat people in your church family like they are part of your family. Invite them to your home for lunch. Take them out to a restaurant with you. Eat together, laugh together and watch a movie together. Really love on them like you love on your own family. That is totally different from the way we do things in the world. The world has all kinds of dividing walls. The church shouldn't be that way. Jesus makes us one family. My challenge is for

the month of February invite at least two people from church into your family for a meal. *The Jesus that joins us is bigger than the differences that divide us.*

The church is a family; don't treat it like a business.

...members of the household of God... Ephesians 2:19 (ESV)

Here is the deal. Family members have chores. They clean their rooms. They do the dishes. They make the dinner. They mow the lawn. They clean the garage. When all the chores fall on one or two family members and everyone else freeloads, things fall apart. That is not a healthy family.

Some of us treat the church like it is a business. When you go to Wal-Mart, do you have chores? Of course not. There is somebody paid to clean up the broken jar of pickles. You don't stop and encourage the greeters when they load the shelves. They are paid to do this. With a business we ask, "What is in it for me?" In business the plan is to get people to serve you in the most inexpensive way possible. That is the way some of you treat the church. You get a free meal once a month, free coffee every week, a warm worship center, good worship music and a sermon. Then you leave the family gathering as fast as you can knowing that somebody will clean it all up after you and serve you again next week. That is the way you treat a business. It is not the way you treat your family.

Now if you are a visitor, that is different. You are a guest of the family. In this family, we don't expect our guests to do the dishes. If you are part of the family, everyone needs to play their role for the family to run smoothly. If you don't have a role in the family, and you are part of it, others are overburdened

and Christ isn't glorified. Remember that we are not a business where you try and get away without paying. We are family where we serve others and care about one another.

The church is a family; mix together.

Another thing about being a family is that we encourage people of different ages to mix together. That is the way we do things in our family and I am sure it is the way you do things in yours. I am not saying it is wrong to have specific ministries for a women, men and high school. These are good. It was trendy for a number of years to shove everybody into affinity groups and never let people mix. There was a college ministry for age only. There was a singles ministry for singles only. There was a young married's ministry and you didn't let people mix.

When you don't let people mix, you are going against what this passage says about *the Jesus that joins us being bigger than the differences that divide us*. Think about this. You let different ages and types of people from your family mix at home, why not at church? One of the best thing our high school students do is develop other adult Christian friends at church. How will the singles learn about a good marriage unless they hang out with the marrieds? How will the young learn wisdom and compassion unless they hang out with the elderly?

Because *the Jesus that joins us is bigger than the differences that divide us*, we try to get everyone together around Jesus.

The church where people are treated like family is the church where God's spirit dwells.

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a

holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20–22 (ESV)

Everyone wants to go to a church that is alive. You can feel the energy in the room. The way people care for you and look you in the eye makes you want to come back. You walk out of one of those churches and you wish you could come back next week.

That is a church all of us long to be a part of. This is the kind of church we strive to be at CrossWinds. Paul said that in a church, when people grasp how big of a deal it is to be brought back to God through Jesus, and how God restores our relationships with each other, when we get ahold of that and we start treating one another like family and we start treating people like family through Jesus, *that's when the church that comes alive!* The thrill of the church isn't the building, it is the people.

Conclusion

As we leave, I kept thinking about what I could give you to help remember the message of this text. These five symbols came to mind, “JJ>DD.” What do they mean? The **J**esus that **J**oins us **is greater than** the **D**ivisions that **D**ivide us. This week, let's focus on being not just a church but a family, because having Jesus trumps anything that tears us apart.



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