

In 1936, the Olympics were held in Berlin. Originally, Hitler intended to ban both Jewish and black athletes from the Games, but when other countries threatened to boycott, he relented. These Olympics were about more than athletics, Hitler was determined to demonstrate the superiority of the Aryan race—his Germans would run faster, jump higher, and prove themselves stronger.

While German athletes didn't win every medal that year, they did win substantially more medals than any other country. But there was one African American athlete whose performance thrilled the German crowds and obliterated the myth of Aryan supremacy—his name was Jesse Owens.

Owens won an unprecedented 4 gold medals in track and field—100 m, 200 m, 4x100 m, and the long jump. While it was customary for leader of the host nation to shake hands with all gold medal winners, Hitler refused to shake Owens' hand. And Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, later explained away Owen's victories, complaining that it wasn't fair for white athletes to compete against black athletes, being that black athletes were more animal than human.

After the Olympics, Jesse Owens arrived by boat in New York and he was celebrated as a national hero. A parade was thrown in his honour, thousands of people lined the streets, and he was escorted by luxury car. But things are not always as they seem.

A reception was held in his honour at the famed Waldorf Astoria Hotel, but because of the colour of Owen's skin, he was not allowed to use the elevator in the main lobby; he was escorted around

back where he was made to use the freight elevator. In the streets he was a hero, but inside the hotel he was still a second-class citizen.

Racial inequality existed on both sides of the Atlantic. Owens once remarked, "*I wasn't invited to shake hands with Hitler...[but] I wasn't invited to the White House to shake hands with the President, either.*" He was arguably the most famous athlete in the world and yet this fame didn't translate into dollars as it had for many other white athletes. White athletes secured endorsement deals and acted in movies, but Owens was reduced to running exhibition meets against dogs and horses.

So what did Owens' 1936 performance prove? On one level, it exposed Hitler's Aryan ideology as bankrupt, but on another level, it simply exposed the bankruptcy of human nature. It revealed the depths to which human prejudice and division runs.

History has proven that humanity, left to itself, doesn't come together in unity—it divides. We are, as a human race, given to mistrust, division, and alienation. This "natural tendency" is a part of the larger picture that the Bible describes as sin—a turning away from God and others.

The question for this morning is: *What can bring humanity together?* The Bible's resounding declaration is **Jesus alone**. Jesus himself is our peace. Jesus alone can reconcile us to God and to one another. In Jesus we find level ground upon which all humanity can stand. In Jesus we can grow beyond tolerating one another's differences to something much more praiseworthy—love.

Over the past few weeks our pastoral team has been preaching through a series entitled, “*The Values That Drive Our Vision*”. Borrowing the analogy of a road trip, if our vision is the destination, then our values are the route by which we travel. Values guide us as we go; they describe *how* we will move towards the accomplishment of our vision. *As we engage in the mission of the church—to glorify God, reach people, and see them transformed—what are the values that guide us as we go?* This morning we come to Value #4.

Mosaic Mentality: We value and celebrate an expression of the Church that is multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and economically diverse—just as a mosaic is produced by integrating individual pieces to create a single image of great beauty. We recognize that our unity does not come from within ourselves, but from Christ alone.¹

As we look to the Scripture this morning, Ephesians 2:11-22, I want to invite you to follow along on the screen as I read.

“11 Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called ‘uncircumcised heathens’ by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. 12 In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. 13 But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. 15 He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. 17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. 18 Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

19 So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. 20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. 21 We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.”

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has removed the barrier that existed between God and humanity. But Jesus has done something more; He has acted to reconcile us—in all of our differences—to one another.

There are three movements within our text—vs. 11-13, vs. 14-18, and v. 19-22—and these movements will provide the outline for my sermon this morning. Let’s take a look at the first.

¹ Galatians 3:26-28.

1. Vs. 11-13, The Problem of Alienation. Vs. 11 and 12 paint a picture of division and fracture. Notice the labels that highlight the divide: Gentile, circumcision, uncircumcision, separate, excluded, foreigner, without hope, and without God. It's a bleak picture.

The ancient city of Ephesus was a cosmopolitan city, housing people from every nation—it was home to rich and poor, male and female, slave and free alike. We may not personally identify with the Jew vs. Gentile division today, but we know firsthand about the barriers that divide us.

illus: There's a story told of a bus driver in Australia. Every day this bus driver would pick up kids and transport them to school—some were Aborigines and some were Caucasians. From the moment the children entered, until the moment they exited, the bus was filled with arguments, name-calling, and fistfights. One day the bus driver had enough and he pulled off to the side of the road.

He stood and addressed the white children first. "*What colour are you?*", he asked them. And they replied, "*We're white.*" The bus driver said, "*Not today, not on my bus. You're not white, you're green, you're all green! Now what colour are you?*" Rather reluctantly they replied, "*Well...I guess were green.*"

Then the bus driver addressed the aborigines and asked, "*What colour are you?*" They replied, "*We're black.*" The bus driver said, "*Not today, not on my bus! You're not black, you're green—everyone on this bus is green! Now what colour are you?*" Rather reluctantly they replied, "*Well...I guess we're green.*" The bus was reduced to an eery silence; the driver got back in his seat and they continued on their way to school.

But a few moments later, the bus driver heard a student in the back say, "*Okay, light green on this side, dark green on that side.*"

This story nicely sums up human nature. Left to ourselves, we find reasons to judge, exclude, and divide. In fact, the Bible tells us, this kind of division is the result of trying to live life apart from God. The turn away from God inevitably leads to a turning away from others.

illus: In just a few weeks my daughter will be leaving Elementary School; next year she will be attending Windsor High School. To this point she's been in one school, in a single classroom, with many of the same classmates for the last 8 years.

Beginning in Kindergarten, it was plain for the parents to see that no two children are exactly alike—each child has different interests, preferences, and capabilities—but in the early days, those differences rarely divided them. When parents threw birthday parties the entire class was invited to attend—no one was excluded or left out because they were all friends.

But as our children begin to grow—physically, mentally, socially—they begin to perceive the differences between them and others. And these differences become magnified, so much so that they begin to overshadow the commonalities between them. By the time they enter High School a full-blown social stratification has taken place. Everyone slots into a particular sub-group and if one doesn't fit nicely into one of the established sub-groups, they tend to be assigned to the *misfit* category.

And of course, the categories don't go away after high school.

Young or old—one generation misunderstands, judges, and writes off another.

Rich or poor—the divide between rich and poor continues to grow in North America, creating an “us and them” mentality.

Blue collar or white collar—this is more than a division between rich and poor, it’s often a perceived division between the “educated” and “uneducated”. I grew up in the blue collar city, in a blue collar neighbourhood, in a blue collar family; neither my parents or grandparents attended university.

As you may know, most years, Surrey is in the running for the prestigious title of “Car-theft capital” of North America. A number of years ago, I heard a news report that Surrey had lost its title to Seattle. I smiled to myself, imagining the people of Surrey taking to the streets chanting, “*We’re number 2!*”

It wasn’t until I moved out of Surrey that I discovered the reputation that it had. When I told people where I was from, they were quick to make negative comments about the place, and by inference, the people. Isn’t everyone from Surrey uneducated and dangerous? A thief, a gang member, or drug dealer?

Female or male—while the subject of gender is both sensitive and complex these days, a part of the problem is the embrace of simplistic stereotypes concerning women and men; it creates barriers between us.

Brown, black, or white—I have visited countries where the colour of your skin predetermines the kind of job you can get. But when you think about it...is it so different in our own country? Canada has a reputation of welcoming new immigrants—I love that about our country—but we have policies in place that severely inhibit new immigrants from flourishing economically. Many of the new Canadians I talk to worked as accountants, nurses, or surgeons in their former countries, but upon arrival on our fair shores, their previous training was invalidated, limiting their options to minimum wage jobs.

Humanity, left to itself, doesn’t come together in unity—it divides. We are, as a human race, predisposed to mistrust, division, and alienation. *What can bring humanity together?* Jesus alone. Let’s take a look at the next movement in our text, vs. 14-18.

2. Vs. 14-18, Jesus is the great Reconciler. Paul tells us that Jesus died so that humanity might be reconciled to God. I’ve got the New Living Translation on the screen behind me, but in the original language, verse 18 says, that through Jesus, we have **access** to the Father, by the Holy Spirit. And this word, “**access**”, is an interesting word; it’s the word used for ushering someone into the presence of royalty.

William Barclay writes, “Jesus ushers us into the very presence of God...and when that door is opened what we find is *grace*; not condemnation, not judgement, not vengeance, but the sheer, undeserved, unearned, unmerited, incredible kindness of God.”²

² William Barclay, *The Letter To The Romans*, 71.

Jesus has ushered us into God's presence, He has secured our adoption into God's family, and this paves the way for us to be reconciled to one another. In vs. 15 and 16 we read, "*He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.*"

Jesus came to form for Himself one new humanity, a people who collectively bear His name. In order to do so, He exposed the barriers that keep us alienated from one another. Jesus has a vision of God's family—it includes the rich and poor, male and female, young and old, along with every nation, tribe, and language.

We may ask, *how can this become reality?* Diversity tends to propel us towards division, not towards unity. How are we brought together?

In Galatians 3:26-28 the apostle Paul writes, "**26** *For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. 28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

Paul isn't saying that faith in Christ eradicates all distinctions. After becoming a Christian, a man is still a man, a woman is still a woman, a Filipino is still a Filipino, and our economic status remains the same. Paul isn't saying that these distinctions are no longer real—he's saying something much more radical. He's saying that in Christ, in the Church, these distinctions are stripped of their power to divide us.

We've all been made in God's image, we all stand in our need before God, and we're all loved by God. When God the Son became human, our humanity was caught up in the humanity of Jesus. In the incarnation, Jesus takes our humanity, sanctifies it, and then gives it back to us.

When we become Christians, He becomes our primary identity marker—our economic status, our gender, our ethnicity, our job, our family, our education, all of these things become secondary.

illus: When we go to a party, or conference—a place where we are meeting new people—inevitably someone will ask you to tell them a little about yourself.

Without thinking, we launch into the distinctions that distinguish us from others. Typically, we begin with our name, because names speak to identity—in particular, our last names often identify our ethnic roots. We might go on to talk about our families—"I'm married and have two kids," or, "I live in Vancouver but my extended family live in China." From there we might offer details about the High School or University we attend; we might describe our job, our accomplishments, or hobbies.

When you meet someone for the first time, and they ask you to describe yourself, when's the last time the first thing you said was, "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ"? "If you want to know who I really am, I need to tell you about Jesus. His life has had such a profound effect on mine that telling you about Him will say a lot more about who I am than my ethnicity, gender, or job ever could."

God the Son became Human. He became what we are so that we might be united to Him, and when we are united to Him, we get our humanity back—unity and diversity, harmony, and equality.

The foot of the cross is the only place where there is level ground for all humanity. Male and female; Asian, South American, Iranian, and European; old and young; rich and poor; together, we constitute the community of the pardoned. Not a single person has earned the favour God has granted—*it is by grace we have been saved, through faith—and this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

It is nearly impossible to feel superior to others when I recognize my own need before God. When I understand that God loves you every bit as much as He loves me, the possibility for unity blossoms. Let's now take a look at the final movement in our text, vs. 19-22.

3. A People (Building) In Whom God Dwells.

“19 So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. 20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. 21 We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. 22 Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.”

In verse 19, the effects of our alienation from God and one another has been undone. We have been rescued, reconciled, and set apart; we are His, and He is ours. We are no longer on the outside looking

in; we have been brought into God's family and we have been bound to one another.

In vs. 20 Paul moves from a relational metaphor—members of God's family—to a construction metaphor: *we are being built together*. The question is, why is God forming this one, new, humanity? We are being built together into a holy temple, and God's goal is to fill us with His glorious presence.

Every builder worth his or her own salt, recognizes the need for a solid foundation; without it, the building will not stand. And it's upon Jesus that this one new humanity is being built; He is the chief cornerstone.

In ancient architecture, cornerstones were the primary load-bearing stones that determined the lines of the entire building. In the same way, Jesus is our Cornerstone.

Jesus Himself is our peace. He is the One *through* whom we have access to God and the One *in* whom we are bound together. When we take our eyes off of Jesus we tend to divide, fixating on the differences among us. But when we look to Jesus, and admit our collective need for God, we can hold on to God and to one another.

In Christ, the barriers that kept us separate from God and one another have been dealt with. He is our Cornerstone, the One upon whom our lives are being built. We are His temple, we belong to Him, *and*, as members of His family, we also belong to one another.

Conclusion: I'm convince that one cannot embrace Jesus without also embracing a mosaic mentality. I have had the privilege of

meeting with Christians in Dubai, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi; in Israel, Palestine, and Cairo; in Senegal, Iraq, and Thailand; in Germany, Hawaii, and all across Canada. In each case, I felt a deep kinship, connection, and sense of family, in spite of the differences of language and culture.

If you could stand up here on the stage with me, and look out at all these faces, you would quickly agree that North Shore Alliance is not a homogenous group. We are young and old, poor and rich, male and female, blue collar and white collar; we are Asian, Persian, African, South American, and European; and, we are leaning into our oneness in Christ.

We value and celebrate an expression of the Church that is multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and economically diverse, recognizing that our unity does not come from within ourselves, but from Christ alone

Christ's vision for His Church, for this church, isn't monochrome. His vision includes babies and great-grandparents, the entire economic spectrum, and diversity in colour, culture and language, and by the grace of God, this is who we are becoming. And what the Lord has brought together, let nothing, and no one, separate.

Prayer

Worship

Invitation to Prayer Ministry

Benediction