

## Newton St. Petrock Baptist Church

Welcome to our devotions for Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June

These devotions will follow closely our message today in Church and will be available on our website too:

[newtonstpetrockbaptistchurch.org.uk](http://newtonstpetrockbaptistchurch.org.uk)

We pray – *Father God, open my eyes, stir my heart and teach me how, ‘To act justly, and to love mercy and walk humbly with...’ You today.* Micah 6:8

We pray: Our Father in heaven.....

Today we are continuing our time with Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Church, so please read Ephesians 2: 11-22

In the first part of chapter 2, verses 1-10 we read of how we were all at one time alienated from God because of our being *‘dead in your transgressions and sins, ...’* but then we read in verse 4 *‘But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...’*

The verses we have read today tells us of our alienation from one another. Praise God – for how through Jesus humanity is able to be together see v14.

You have probably heard many, many times, stories of “us and them”. It might be that you have situations in your own life where you feel part of an ‘us’ group as opposed to others who make up the ‘them’ group. Usually the ‘us’ group is the right group, and the ‘them’ group is the wrong group!!

A true sadness is this: “Us vs. Them” will not reach a lost world.

In Luke ch. 10, Jesus teaches us *‘to love our neighbour’*. A religious leader responds by saying *‘Who is my neighbour’*. Luke tells us he said this to *‘justify himself’*

How does the question justify the questioner? – by limiting those he has to love. Now we are down to ‘me and them’!!

We tend to view the world through an ‘us v. them’ lens. We like to be with like-minded people. That’s why the Jews despised the Gentiles, and vice versa That is why there is so much grief with race, rich and poor, politics, religion, sport(!) and culture. I used to live in Wales, and every year we had the Village ‘7s’ rugby tournament. Most of the players were farmer’s sons, or local builders, forestry workers – we all knew each other and about each other very well. But when it came to the field of play, I was just pleased to escape with my life, let alone winning!

We live in a world of shared humanity, a world which is marked by a shared lostness, because we do not *‘love our neighbour’*

The second part of Ephesians 2 is about reconciliation. We know of, we see, even experience alienation in one form or another, but Jesus in v15b *‘His purpose was to create one new humanity in himself’*. Just pause for a moment and consider the depth of love behind that statement.....

For Jews and Gentiles in Paul's time, the separation was nowhere more evident than at the temple in Jerusalem. The outer most parts of the Temple were accessible to Gentiles. But then there was a dividing wall, some 1.5 metres high, beyond which only Jews could go. On this 'dividing wall' history tells us that it did not say 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' but rather 'Trespassers will be executed' ( John Stott – BST-Eph.) One of these stone inscriptions was found as recently as 1871 and another in 1935.

Paul tells us how Jesus has made us both one, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility in v14 and in v16 reconciling both ( N.B **both** – the us and the them) to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. We know, very sadly, that believers in Jesus now, are mostly without a Jewish heritage.

Jesus came to preach peace, and to show all of humanity that it was through Him that access to the Father was gained.

Paul boldly declares that because of Jesus reconciling work on the cross, foreigners and strangers now exist no longer, but rather they are *fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household*. V19

Many of you will know the blessing of living your life mostly in one place, where you are completely at home. Others will know a life that has been lived in many different places and that when you come to a new community there is that sense of being something of an alien. Gill and I 'have lived' in 21 different places throughout our lives. But we have been blessed, because in most places, not all, the local church and Christian brothers and sisters (from many different backgrounds) have helped us settle through welcome and love. They brought to us – because of Jesus – peace.

The end of this passage tells us that believers in Jesus are being built together with Jesus as the Cornerstone of the building. '*In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord*' ( No more talk of divisions in the temple! ) This not a bungalow! – but a building which is alive because it '*rises*'! But even more intimately, even more purposefully, '*And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit*'

Each of us, we are God's design. He wants to dwell in us – together.

Ephesians has to this point told us how God through Jesus, has blessed us,; desired for us to know Jesus better; reminded us of where we have come from, and now how all of us have such an important role which is summed up once more in '*Love your neighbour*'.

Who do I know who may be feeling 'alienated' – lonely, fearful in my community? How wide are the arms of our church spread to welcome 'strangers'? Once more we understand the significance of Jesus arms – spread wide on that cross – for all humanity – equally. *Thank you Jesus.*

*O praise the Name of the Lord our God. O praise His  
Name forevermore. For endless days we will sing Your praise. Oh Lord  
oh Lord our God.*