

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11) – July 21, 2024

“¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

–Ephesians 2:18–20–

In 2003 I spent a semester studying abroad in Aalborg, Denmark. It was a life-long dream, and I was so excited to arrive at what would be my home for the next five months of my life. I did my best to wear clothing that helped me fit in. Danes would wear mostly neutral colors, especially gray and black. And for the most part, I could blend in pretty well... until... until I spoke Danish. I had a very limited knowledge of the language, and I could certainly get by, but my thick American accent gave me away every time. And while I did my best to blend in, it was obvious that I was a foreigner, a stranger in a strange land.

Danes have different customs and traditions from Americans. It first hit me hard when Thanksgiving rolled around. The other American students and I put on a traditional Thanksgiving meal for our Danish friends and other international students. It was a lot of fun, but it wasn't the same as celebrating in our homeland.

It can be hard, even scary, to feel out of place. We can feel as though there are barriers up, and it can be difficult to knock them down. Paul was writing this letter to brand new Christians in Ephesus. They were really struggling with barriers and cultural differences. These differences and divisions had existed between these two cultures (Jews and Gentiles) for centuries. And it led to hostility and being at odds with one another. That, in turn, led to division with God. Their sinfulness put up barriers between themselves and God. So how does one knock down those barriers? Well, we can't do it on our own. We must rely on God to knock them down for us. And God isn't going to do it with hostility the way we sinful humans might do.

We are reconciled to God through Christ. Last week we heard how we are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the promise of his Holy Spirit. Through Christ, our differences can be knocked down and laid aside. We are united in Christ. We are apart of his family. God's grace is enough for us, and he freely gives us his grace no matter what kind of barriers we may have with others. Because God forgives us through suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus, we are called to forgive one another.

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