

BETTER THAN BURIED TREASURE

10th in a Series on Ephesians called, "Messages to the Misfits"
Ephesians 2:14-19

Paul Hellyer is a former Canadian politician, at one time the defense minister of Canada. Five years ago he made headlines for comments he made in an interview. He has long been open about his belief in UFO's but in that interview he claimed that there are alien beings living among us. He said that four different species have been visiting our planet for thousands of years, but that now he has received reports that there are, in fact, 80 different alien species living among us, including a species he called Tall Whites who are working with the US Air Force in Nevada. He said the aliens possess technology far superior to anything we have, but that they are refusing to share most of it with us until we stop fighting wars and polluting the planet. He said microchips are technology aliens have shared with us.

Um, let's just say Mr. Hellyer's comments cause me a bit of concern about the judgment of our neighbors to the north, who had him serving in an important political position. I'm not totally sure his belt goes through all the loops, if you catch my meaning. However, the idea that aliens are living here, blending in with human beings, has long been fodder for science fiction movies. Superman is supposed to be an alien who looks just like any normal human (especially when he wears glasses and poses as Clark Kent, reporter for the *Daily Planet*). I am going to state unequivocally that I believe there are alien beings living among normal humans today, but I am not on the lookout for UFO's. The beings I refer to don't have secret super technologies or superhuman abilities. They aren't from another planet, but at the same time they are not of this world. In fact, there are some right here in this room today. They look like ordinary humans, but they are quite different. But those differences are all on the inside. No, I don't mean their anatomy is different, like they have three kidneys or something. Oh, wait, my wife has three kidneys... I suspect she's one of them... How are these beings different? We will get a glimpse of them as we look today at Ephesians 2:14-19.

PREMISE: GOD IS CREATING A NEW HUMANITY

Verse 15 says that God had a purpose in what he did through Jesus Christ. That purpose is to create "one new humanity out of the two." The two he referred to were Jews and Gentiles. I will address that in a moment, but for now, observe that God's intent was to make a new kind of human race.

This should not surprise us. In Romans 12:2 Paul had written that as a result of the gospel that Paul described in the first 11 chapters of that book, followers of Jesus should not be like the world around them, but should be transformed. They should be different. The same idea shows up in 2 Corinthians 5:17, which says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here." God is in the process of making a new kind of human being, and that process starts with and is driven by the gospel of Christ.

This sounds like some sort of science fiction story. It's like the \$6 million man. We can make him better than he was. It is not science fiction, it is theological fact. God is restoring humans according to the original design. He is making what appears to us today to be a new class of human beings. The point is not merely to make humans who are smarter, or faster, bigger, stronger, more durable, longer lasting. It is to create a race of people who have a different nature. Ultimately they will be people who will not be marked by conflict, crime, abuse, violence, division, war, poverty, racism and so many of the intractable ills of our race. They will be a different kind of people, not physically, but spiritually and relationally.

THIS NEW RACE WILL BE PEOPLE OF PEACE

The big emphasis in this letter is that this new class of human beings will be marked by peace and unity. They will be noticeably different in this regard. Observe that he says in verse 14 that Christ has made “the two groups into one and has destroyed the barrier.”

What two groups is he referring to? In that day it was Jew and Gentile. To this day Jews are subjected to persecution. It still happens in our country, and it continues to happen all over the world. Anti-Semitism is becoming malignant and common in France and in much of Europe, and it is increasingly rearing its ugly head in our country as well, as we saw once again in Poway just a couple of weeks ago. This is not new. It has plagued the Jewish people throughout their history. It was a problem in the first century as well. For instance, the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from the city of Rome sometime around 49 AD. Meanwhile the ancient Jews saw Gentiles as people to be avoided. They pretty much despised Gentiles. When Gentiles began believing in Jesus it threatened to divide the church because Jews could not accept the idea that Gentiles could be a part of God's kingdom without first becoming Jewish.

Paul says there was a barrier, a dividing wall of hostility between the two groups. That wall consisted of the law of Moses with all of its rules and regulations. Paul said Jesus broke down that wall by removing the law as the requirement for having access to the Father, as he puts it in verse 18. Jesus set up a new covenant, a covenant of grace through faith. All now gain God's kingdom not by obeying a law, but by faith in what Jesus Christ has done. This is true of both Jew and Gentile. So all are loved and accepted by God on the same basis. That basis is grace and nothing else. So now there is no Jew and Gentile. The two have become one body. Six times in these verses Paul uses the words “peace” and “one.”

In our world today there are many divisions in addition to the Jew and Gentile divide. I don't think I need to tell you that there are racial divisions in our nation that are painful and real. Laurie and I recently watched the movie *Green Book*, which was based on a true story. It tells the story of Donald Shirley, an African American musician and composer, who did a concert tour through the South in 1962, chauffeured by Tony Vallelonga, an Italian night club bouncer. The racism depicted in the movie is painful to watch, but sadly, true to life. It would be great if

more than 50 years later that racism no longer existed. Sadly, while it is no longer legal and institutionalized, it still exists.

Unfortunately this is not a function of some defect in America. It is a function of a defect in human beings. China is made up of 90% ethnic Han people. Despite the largely homogenous make up of China's population there is a problem of racism against minority groups such as the Uyghurs, the Yao people and Tibetans. In addition there is prejudice against black people and widespread, deep hatred of Japanese people. The Japanese return that hatred with disdain for the Chinese, but they also have disdain for Koreans and Filipinos, among others, including the small number of minority groups in Japan like the Okinawans. Latin America is rife with discrimination, especially against indigenous people. Shia Muslims hate Sunni Muslims and vice versa. The Hutus massacre of Tutsi people in Rwanda is well known. Serbs and Croatians are still at war in their hearts. We all know about the caste system in India. Wherever there are people, there is also prejudice, hatred, racism and discrimination.

God's purpose was to create a new race of people who are different, being restored to what he originally designed us to be, people who are at peace with others and who live in harmony and unity. His purpose was to make a people who could truly be unified, despite differences of ethnicity or class or any other dividing factor. Why did God make this a focus? Why is unity and peace so important to him?

The biggest factor here is his nature. Think about what the Bible tells us God is like. There are some aspects of his being that we would not know if he did not reveal it to us through his Word. The first is that God exists in a way that is not comprehensible to us. He is one being, but somehow, within that one being there are three persons. You can spend a long time trying to wrap your head around this, but you're not going to quite get it. At least I can't. I accept it, but I don't fully comprehend it. It just is. What this means is that relationship is a part of who God is. It is built in to his nature. Within himself, long before there were any other beings in existence, God never felt alone for he had love, fellowship within his own being. When he expresses himself, inevitably relationship and love will be woven into that expression. So when we read that God created humans in his image, what does that tell you? It says we ought to expect that relationship and love will be an integral part of being human.

Sure enough, in Genesis 2 we see God looking at the first man and saying, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Why not? Because he is built for relationship. It's part of who he is. Relationship is a big part of being human. Life is just meant to be shared or it is empty. Our daughter in law, Anna, recently had to go to Israel for her job. She's the marketing director for Emmanuel Tours, which organizes trips to Israel. She and Toby went last year, but her boss wanted her to go there again last month. On this trip she visited some places she had not been to the first time. But her reaction was interesting. She said the sights she saw were interesting, but that seeing them did not have the same effect on her. The reason was she was not able to share

them with Toby, so there was a bit of an empty feel to it. That's because life at its core is about relationship.

So at the heart of being human, of living, is relationship. That means unity and peace naturally are going to be crucially important. Where relationship is in turmoil, life will be in turmoil. Remember that 1 John 4:8 says God is love. Again, at the heart of his being is love. Where he is present, where his Spirit rules, there will be love, and where there is real love, there will be peace and unity. In 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly." Oh, they were worldly. So they were into partying and sex, maybe overindulged alcohol? That's what Christians often think of as being worldly, and certainly that is an aspect of worldliness. But it wasn't the telltale. What tipped Paul off to the fact that they were not living by the Holy Spirit? He tells us in verse 3. "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?" They were not living like this new class of human beings, but like regular old humans. The thing that was a dead giveaway was *they couldn't get along with each other*. They were arguing and jealous of each other, and that always is a sign of worldliness.

Another reason God made being peaceful and unified an essential part of this new class of human is that unity is a powerful evidence that God is at work. In John 17:21 Jesus prayed for his followers, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The oneness of Jesus' followers would be a powerful evidence that Jesus was who he claimed, God in human form.

This is because humans long for unity, but cannot produce it. If you pay attention you can see this longing for unity in some subtle ways. I have mentioned this before, but you can see it at wedding venues. I once did a wedding in Balboa Park. It was a crazy environment. There were loads of people in the park. There were jets flying over us seemingly only a hundred feet up, and they were very loud. What I found interesting is that tons of people who were just there as tourists stopped to watch the wedding. Weddings are not great spectator events. There is zero action. Mostly everybody just stands there. The only time something really interesting happens it's usually bad, like someone fainting or tripping and falling. So were all those spectators sort of like the people who watch car races, hoping for a big wreck? No, I don't think so. Then why were they there? Why stand and watch a wedding between two people you don't even know? Because people love to see a wedding. Seeing two people in love makes them happy. They want people to love each other and be able to live in unity.

If God could truly create this new kind of humans and they could love each other and live in unity, it would be, literally, a miracle. People would know it's a miracle, and they would be drawn to it, because they all want it. There are large segments of the church that think that

people will only believe if they see miracles, so we have to produce miracles. But Jesus said people will only believe if they see the miracle of Christians living in peace, love and unity. That is the bigger miracle, because it simply doesn't happen in this world.

But this raises an obvious problem, doesn't it? Paul says God is creating this new humanity that can live as one. But in the church, we don't. We know the church is fractured, and full of people who can't get along. Some time ago I read about a church that had a big huge conflict over a piano bench! Apparently the bench was an antique, and the two factions argued for years over what should be done with it. Finally a pastor from another church mediated the conflict. Essentially the church split apart. The agreed upon solution was the two groups would meet at different times and use the bench as they saw fit!

Greater Bellevue Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia, had a disagreement over whether their pastor, David Stephens, should continue in his role. They had a meeting in which the leadership would vote to determine the question. Unfortunately things got heated. Eventually it devolved into a full-on brawl. It was so bad that a deputy who came to calm the situation had to call for backup. Yes, that sounds like a new, peaceful, unified humanity, doesn't it?

This is not new. Remember what Paul said about the Corinthians. They were also torn apart by dissension and division. They fought over who the best leader was, who was the most spiritual, and they were suing each other in court. The Romans had disagreements over whether it was permissible to eat certain foods. The Philippian church was divided by a controversy caused by a power struggle between two women that divided the church into factions. The first church got into a fight over the distribution of money given to help widows. The entire early church battled over whether one had to obey the Law of Moses.

Does this mean that God's plan simply hasn't worked? There is no miracle of unity and peace, no new humanity, so this seems to say to the world that Jesus was not who he claimed. He did not have the power to change people into people of peace. Is that what we should conclude? Sometimes it feels that way. But I submit to you that God is in the process of creating this new humanity, but the process is not complete. Unfortunately the ugliness of self is still alive in us. There is a crucial truth that we should never lose sight of. *Every moment that we serve self, we are damaging relationships. We are dividing people.*

We have to think about how God is creating a new humanity. We tend to think it is that God does something magical or miraculous. He sort of says the magic words over us and instantly we are changed into a new kind of person. But that's not how it happens. God's Spirit does have the power to work changes in us, but part of the way he does that is through teaching. Otherwise all the stuff in the Bible is pointless. We need to remember what Jesus taught us. In Matthew 16:24 he said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross

and follow me.” So we must learn to not serve self. *To the degree that we say no to self we will be able to live in unity with others.* To the degree that we serve self we will be destroying unity.

You see the same message in Philippians 2:3-4, where it says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” Then Paul said we should have the attitude that Jesus had. So God is making a new humanity that is peaceful and can live in unity, and a part of that process is teaching us to not serve self but to love and serve others.

Did you notice in Ephesians 2:16 how Paul said God has put to death hostility between people? It was through the cross. The cross of Christ is what breaks down the walls. It condemns self-centeredness. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” If Christ lives in us, we also will be giving ourselves for others. When we live by the cross we will deny self and live to serve.

When God’s people do that the results are remarkable. We all know about the horrors that happened in Rwanda in 1994 when nearly 1 million people were killed in the genocidal killing spree. There is a woman named Dancil Neabazungi who lived through the horror. Her husband and 17 of her relatives took refuge in a church during the violence. Soldiers encouraged them to go there, then the soldiers threw grenades into the church and when people tried to flee, they shot them. They killed her husband and much of her family. But today churches have been growing. A pastor named Paul Gitwaza has a church of over 7000 people, with Hutus and Tutsis worshiping side by side. Dancil Neabazungi worships there with people from the tribe that wiped out her family. It is a powerful example of the fact that God can and does create a new kind of people who can live in amazing harmony.

THIS NEW RACE WILL BE CITIZENS OF A DIFFERENT KINGDOM

In verse 19 Paul says something else about this new class of people. He says these people, who once were on the outside, now will be “fellow citizens with God’s people.” They will be citizens of a kingdom that is very different from this world. Philippians 3:20 says of us, “our citizenship is in heaven.” Colossians 1:13 says God has “rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” We have citizenship in the kingdom of God.

This is tremendous news. We were in the domain of darkness. That is not a good place to be. Did you see the *Lord of the Rings* movies, or read the books? I did both. The enemy in those stories was Sauron, the second Dark Lord. His was a domain of darkness. Wherever his power went, darkness spread. His land was Mordor, which means, “dark land.” In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, it is described this way: “There is evil there that does not sleep...It is a barren wasteland, riddled with fire, ash and dust. The very air you breathe is a poisonous fume.” That

was Tolkien's way of picturing a fallen world ruled by the evil one. It was a picture of this dark world.

But wait a minute. Louis Armstrong sang, "I see skies of blue, clouds of white, the bright blessed day, the dark sacred night. And I say to myself, what a wonderful world." That doesn't sound like Mordor. And the world is wonderful in many ways, isn't it? There is much beauty here and much to be enjoyed. But what if we look beyond the blue skies and white clouds? What if we probe deeper? What I have found in 40 years of ministry is that under the surface there is an incredible amount of pain. There is fear everywhere. People struggle with guilt, feeling they don't measure up and they strive mightily to keep up the front that everything is fine. For so many there is despair, and over it all lays the gloom of death, from which no one escapes. There is horrifying evil that seems to arise unexpectedly.

God has rescued us from that dark realm and brought us into his kingdom, a kingdom of peace and joy and light. He has given us his love and filled our world with hope. In Matthew 13:44 Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." In other words, the kingdom of heaven is a treasure so precious that any sane person would joyfully trade everything he has to gain it.

People who have been rescued and brought into this kingdom are going to be different, because instead of living in a land of shadow that ends in total darkness, they live in a kingdom of light and hope. They have cause for joy even in the worst moments of life, because this world is not all they have.

Laurie saw a sweater online that appeared to be exactly what she had been looking for, and it was on sale for a terrific low price. So she bought it. When it came, it wasn't anything like what she expected. It looked like it had been made from the coat of a yak and the sleeves were absurdly short. It would have fit all right if Laurie had arms like a T Rex, but she actually has normal length arms, so this was a clear no go. She emailed the company to ask about how to return it. They emailed back and told her they would refund her money and she should just not bother returning the item. Just keep it. That's how bad it was. No one wants it, not even the people who made it. Sometimes it seems to me that people regard having the kingdom of God like that. Great, just what I always didn't want. But the fact is, Jesus said it is the greatest treasure one could ever find.

Recently Laurie and I were meeting with a couple who will be getting married next week. One evening in meeting with them for some reason Laurie dug up our old wedding album. Somehow she also found the ceremonial wedding license we received when we got married. Looking at that piece of paper brought back a lot of memories. I remembered the incredible joy when Laurie agreed to marry me. It was literally the best thing that could ever happen. I still had to go

to Hebrew class and all my other classes. I still had no money. I still was in my last semester of school and had no clue what I was going to do when I graduated. But all of that was eclipsed by one incredible, joyous, glorious, shining fact. Laurie was going to become my wife. What could be better? Nothing. Nothing is anywhere close to as great as that. As we approached the wedding I remember there were two issues that came up that were proposed to be a part of our wedding, that I absolutely did not want. In the end, both of them were part of the wedding. I didn't get what I wanted. And I couldn't care less, because I was getting what I most wanted. Laurie was going to marry me, and the rest of it didn't matter even a little. Jesus said having the kingdom of God is that good. It is the best thing that could ever happen. It is such a valuable treasure that we would trade everything we have to gain it. When we believe that, imagine how different we will be. We will be people whose underlying view of life is joy and hope. Yes, there will be disappointments and losses, but we have the greatest treasure life could ever bring us. We have the kingdom of God!

The kingdom of God is a very different kingdom than the nations of this world. We are citizens of a kingdom that the world doesn't understand, and as a result we will live in ways the world doesn't get.

We go down to go up

In Matthew 18:1 the disciples asked a question that was on their minds all the time. "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" There were asking what we always ask. Who matters most? How do I climb the ladder and end up on top? Everyone in the world is asking some form of that question continually. Jesus' answer is astounding. In verse 4 he said, "Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." We love kids in our society. We had the chance to take care of our granddaughters for a day on Friday. What fun it was. Little Ella is at a stage where she is showing remarkable maturity for a three-year old, and she is very funny. Laurie had a birthday recently. Her philosophy on that event is that it should be celebrated for the entire month. So Friday, as she deems appropriate, yet another package came for her even though it was more than a week after her birthday. When she got the package Ella asked what it was and Laurie told her it was a birthday present. Clearly incredulous, Ella said, "*Again?*" She is smart, cute and precious. But I wouldn't suggest she should be nominated to run for President next year. We don't elect kids as President. We don't seek their wisdom on the great issues facing us. They're "just kids," whose opinions aren't sought. Jesus said if we want to be great we should humble ourselves and be willing to be considered as unimportant, to not care about being somebody.

In Mark 10:43 he said if we want to become great then we must be the servant of everybody. Be everybody's servant, really? So everyone can boss me around? That's the way to be great. The reason is pretty simple. To love is to serve. Love that is uncoupled from serving is hypocrisy. It is not love at all. So Jesus was saying we are to be the lovers of all, and the greatest, most noble,

most powerful thing we can do, is love. Can you imagine how different this kingdom will be when those in it live like that? It will be incredible.

We die to live

We already have seen this, but remember that Jesus said we are to deny self. We die to selfish desires, selfish goals, self-orientation - and follow him. That really does feel like a death to us.

It's that moment when Laurie and I were going to go out to dinner and see a movie on New Year's Eve. I knew that Laurie wanted to see *Mary Poppins Returns*. Laurie loves Mary Poppins. When she was little it was one of her favorite movies, and she has taken that love with her into her adult years. A new Mary Poppins movie was for her almost a dream come true. I am going to lose points with some of you with the following admission, but it is the truth. I just don't get Mary Poppins. I didn't enjoy the movie at all. I mean, come on, what is "supercalifragilistic expialidocious" supposed to mean? And I ask you, did anything get blown up in the movie? Was there a single airplane? Did you see any guns at all? I think not. So here's not my favorite way to ring in the new year. Go see the new Mary Poppins movie. It's only 90 minutes or so, but for me it would be a "put me out of my misery" dull 90 minutes. I really would prefer to pass on paying to have to sit through that.

Saying no to self meant saying to Laurie, "Let's go see the Mary Poppins movie on New Year's Eve." It felt sort of like I was committing myself to an hour and a half of death. It turned out to not be that bad (because I slept through some of it). But my point is, it is hard sometimes to die to self. In fact, it is hard pretty much every time you do it.

But do you know what Jesus said would happen if you do that? In Matthew 16:25 he said, "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." In other words, the way to find life, the way to really be alive, is to say no to self! Die in order to live. There are many other ways this kingdom that we are a part of is different. For instance when someone persecutes, we bless instead of retaliate. But you see that this is an upside down kingdom that the world does not understand. But it is a kingdom that is glorious and joyful.

IMPLICATIONS

KNOW THAT YOU ARE NEW

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul says that if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. Because you believe in Jesus, you are a part of this new humanity God is bringing about. You are a new thing. You are not just a same old, run-of-the-mill human being. You are this new class of person. Often one of the most important things we need to do is remember what is true of us. It changes how we think about ourselves, and that should have some impact on how we act as well.

I saw an article about the wife of Britain's Prince Harry, Meghan Markle, now officially the Duchess of Sussex. It was about the fact that she is no longer who she used to be. She is now a British royal, and that means a lot of changes for her. It means no more acting career for her. It means no more social media. She can no longer sign autographs. She can not wear miniskirts anymore. As a royal she had to receive anti-terrorism training from British SAS. It means she can no longer eat shell fish due to the high risk of food poisoning. She also cannot eat garlic (due to the high risk of bad breath, I guess). She was baptized into the Church of England. Her diction is even changing, becoming more British. There are changes in her body language, the way she stands when posing for pictures.

The point of all this is that she now sees herself as a British Royal, the Duchess of Sussex. She has a new identity. She sees herself and thinks of herself in ways that are different from who she was before. It is different from most people and these differences have some implications for how she behaves. So it is with us. We are a new creation, God's new class of being. We should see that as true of us and act accordingly.

LIVE AS A CITIZEN OF THE KINGDOM

So first of all, rejoice. You are a citizen of heaven. You have been rescued from the domain of darkness. You are in the kingdom of light, a kingdom of forgiveness, love and acceptance from God, a kingdom of solid, concrete hope, a kingdom of real, full life and freedom. You have the treasure for which any sane person would sell everything, and I mean everything, in order to gain this treasure. It is the most precious possession you could ever have. Never forget that. Thank God for it. Rejoice in it. View all of life from the perspective that no one on earth is more blessed than you are. Just having that perspective will make you a different, more joyful person.

Live by the ideals of the upside-down kingdom of God, which is really the right-side-up kingdom. This is a kingdom of peace. But in order to make it a kingdom of peace, you must say no to self. You must live for the Kingdom of Christ, not the Kingdom of You.

Missionary and author Leslie Newbiggin wrote, "Live in the Kingdom of God in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the only answer."