

JJ

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Trinity  
August 2, 2009  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
Hecla, SD

Text: Ephesians 2:13-22 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.*

Theme: ACCESS!

Dear fellow citizens of heaven, members of the household of God, fellow redeemed,

How many passwords do you have to keep track of? It seems that nowadays just about everything is password protected. If you want to withdraw money from an ATM you need a “Personal Identification Number” or PIN. If you want to check the voicemail on your cell phone you need to enter your password. I understand that most schools have now gone to digital report cards. Parents are able to check the grades of their children online. This too is password protected. Maybe you have seen some garage door openers that require a password for you to be able to open the garage door from the outside of your house.

The purpose of passwords is to limit access. For instance, you don’t want a total stranger to have the ability to take money out of your bank account. Nor would you want just anybody to be able to open your garage door and gain access. The government limits access to vital information. If you do not have the right password, that means you are not allowed access to that information. Yet even with these safeguards in place, what do we hear again and again on the news? Someone has found a way around the passwords and has gained access to private information.

What about access to the Creator of the Universe? When we speak about having access to God, there was a time when man walked and talked back and forth with God. When there was nothing to separate God from man. That was in the perfection of the Garden of Eden. But once sin entered the world that all changed. Because of sin, which is rebellion against God, man was at enmity with God. Man hid from God and God separated Himself from man. We read in Isaiah 59, *“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”* (Is 59:2) Because of sin access to the holy God is

denied. Yet in our text Paul says that we have access to God. How do we gain such access? And what does it mean for each one of us to have such access? That will be the focus of our examination of God's Word today. May the Holy Spirit by whom we gain access, be with us that we may truly appreciate this access.

As our text begins, the Apostle Paul is addressing the division or enmity that exists between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were very proud of their heritage. The Jews are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were the Covenant people of God. Almighty God had chosen them to be His own special people. Through them the promised Savior of the world would come. God had set them apart from the heathen, Gentile world through His Law. His law sort of "walled them in" from the rest of the world. The Jews did things that were unheard of among the Gentiles. For example, adultery was forbidden, while it was common place among the heathen Gentiles. All baby boys were to be circumcised on the eighth day. Every last detail of their worship life was prescribed by God. God gave these Laws to the Old Testament Jews to keep them separate from the heathen world.

The Jews, therefore, looked down on the Gentiles - or all who were non-Jews. To them the Gentiles were uncircumcised and unclean. They did not have the Law. They were outside of the covenant. For the same reason the Gentiles were none to fond of the Jews. They hated the Laws and customs of the Jewish people. They despised the God of the Jews. This is the enmity or hostility that the Jews and Gentiles had toward one another.

One thing, in particular, that the Jews prided themselves on was the access they had to God. They had His temple in Jerusalem where they worshiped Him and He promised to hear them. He promised to be with them and to be their God. The Gentiles had no such promises since they did not worship the God of all Creation. In the verses leading up to our text Paul writes of the Gentiles, "***You were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.***" (Eph 2:12) This is the worst of it all. They had no access to God since they did not believe or worship the true God, but instead gods made by the hands of men. They had no hope.

Our ancestors were Gentiles. We would have been grouped with those having no hope and without God in the world. But thanks be to God that Jesus came. Paul writes in the first verse of our text, "***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.***" The Gentiles who were far from God and His promise of salvation were made near through the death of Jesus. The difference that existed between Jew and Gentile was nullified by Christ. In Christ the Law was fulfilled and abolished. Now there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Jesus reconciled both ***to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*** While the Jews were the covenant people of God they were rebellious sinners. Their relationship with God needed to be reconciled or made right just as much as the Gentiles did. This Jesus did Himself through the cross. Since both Jew and Gentile needed Jesus to die on the cross to save both, the enmity that was between them was put to death.

So it is Jesus who gives both Jew and Gentile access to the one true God. Verse 18, "***For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.***" Through Jesus the Jew has direct access to the God of all Creation. Through Jesus, the Gentile who had been far from God, is brought near to God and is granted access. This is done by the same Holy Spirit who works faith in the heart of both. By the Spirit worked faith in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile alike has access to the Father. Both Jew and Gentile believer can go to God at any time in prayer and

lay his requests before Him. Both Jew and Gentile believer does not need to fear God as a judge who is angry about sin, but a loving Father who cares about His children.

You too have been given this access! Through Jesus you have access by the Holy Spirit to the Father. Think of it like your relationship with your father. Most of the time you were glad when your dad came home. You were glad to hear his voice or see him walk in. But remember that time you did that bad thing and knew you were going to get it when dad got home? Though it was the same person you longed to see, because of the bad thing you did you dreaded to hear his voice or see him walk in the door. You dreaded it because of what you did and fear of punishment.

Had Jesus not died on the cross for our sins, God would be a Father we would fear because of the guilt of our sin. We would be like Adam who tried to hide from God in the Garden after he sinned. We should fear His wrath and punishment, His anger over our sin. But Jesus has changed all that. Through the cross He has reconciled us to God. The relationship which was wronged by our sin, was made right by Jesus. We who were afar off, have been brought near to God. Through Jesus we have access by the Spirit to the Father. We need not fear Him. He is our loving Father and we are His beloved children. At any time, in any place, through that Spirit worked faith in Jesus, we can go right to our heavenly Father and talk to Him about anything. We have access to the Creator of the Universe!

When I was growing up I always felt uncomfortable when I had to ask my friends parents for something. Part of the reason for the discomfort was because they were not my parents and I was not a member of their household. I felt like an outsider. That should not be the way we feel about the access we have with God as our Father. While we are Gentiles and not the natural descendants of Abraham we should not feel like outsiders. Paul writes that because of what Jesus has done, ***“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”*** Right along with Abraham, Elijah, David, and Daniel we are fellow citizens of heaven. We are not outsiders but we are fellow members of the household of God. We are children of the Heavenly Father. As members of His household our heavenly Father takes care of us and promises an inheritance of eternal life. Through faith in Jesus we are anything but outsiders, we have access to the Father!

This access is not possible without Jesus. Jesus Himself testified, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*** (Jn 14:6) Paul speaks in our text of Jesus being the chief cornerstone. The cornerstone is that all important foundation stone that is going to give you direction for the rest of the building. If the cornerstone is crooked the foundation for your building will be crooked and the building will fall. Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith.

With Jesus as the cornerstone, the apostles and the prophets laid the foundation of our faith. Jesus is the centerpiece of all Scripture. ***“These are they which testify of Me,”*** Jesus said. (Jn 5:39) The Old Testament prophets pointed ahead to Jesus. The New Testament apostles expounded on the work of redemption which Jesus did. They are the foundation of our faith, the foundation of the Holy Christian Church. ***“In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.”*** With Jesus as the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation, we are building our faith upon this solid foundation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

This is where another aspect of “access” comes in. Not only do we have access to the Father through faith in Jesus, but in the Spirit God has access to us. We are His holy temple, we are His habitation. God dwells in us. Jesus said, ***“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”*** (Jn 14:23) Think of what this means! God is dwelling in the heart of every believer. We are His habitation. He is abiding with us to bless us and to protect us. ***“I am with You always,”*** Jesus promises His followers. (Mt 28:20)

We have access to the Father and God has access to us. We can go to Him and He is with us. Paul expands on this to the Corinthians, ***“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”*** (1 Cor 6:19-20) These bodies of ours are temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore even as the Temple in Jerusalem or our church building here in Hecla is used to glorify and praise God in everything we do, so we should view our bodies the same way. We use them to glorify Jesus who died for us, the Spirit who has made us members of the household of God, and the Father who has made us His children.

On my desk at home I have of passwords scribbled on a post-it note. These passwords are important to me so I can gain access to my different online accounts. Sometimes I enter the wrong password and access is denied. Praise be to God that Jesus is the only password we need to gain access to heaven. Through this cornerstone of our faith we have access to the throne of Almighty God. He is our Father and we are His children. Through Jesus, God has access to our hearts and makes His home with us. Praise be to Jesus for the access He has granted us! Amen.