

November 9, 1989 – do you remember where you were that day, what you were doing, what you were seeing, thinking, experiencing? For those of us who were yet to be born or are too young to remember that day, do you know what happened on November 9, 1989? It was a BIG day, a HUGE day in the history of our world, a day some say when the 20th century ended and the 21st century emerged, a day that marked a whole new beginning in the world's troubled history.

November 9, 1989 – is the day the Berlin Wall came down, the day the iron Curtain was thrown aside, the day that the possibility of a re-united Germany and a re-united Europe became a reality.

After months and years of prayers and protests, criticism and encouragement, threats and promises; after months and years of effort by people of almost every political persuasion and religious affiliation, the Wall fell or more properly was breached, torn apart, broken down, destroyed. The Wall which had been the symbol of division, the divider of a city and a continent and the world, the barrier between families, between the past and the future, between freedom and fear, hope and hopelessness, was consigned to history as new chapters started to be written to create new possibilities for millions of people. Has all that has happened since been perfect? No! But huge steps forward have been made all because of what happened on November 9, 1989!

Please hold onto the events and the emotions and the effect of what happened on November 9, 1989 as I remind you of these words we heard earlier from Ephesians – “In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he, Jesus, is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups – Jews and Gentiles - into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.”

The entire Ephesian letter is a passionate argument that the church is the new family, formed, called, built by God out of formerly feuding and fractured humanity. From those who were previously divided, Jews and Gentiles, a new household has been formed, a new people called the church. To be in the church is to be a member of an alternative community, a new people with values, views, and virtues different from the world, a people, a community called to live in a new way such that the world, through Christ, might be saved from itself. This epistle addresses the stunning, unbelievable fact that even Gentiles are included in the promises of God to Israel. From two once alienated, hostile groups, Jews and Gentiles, God has made a "new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace". The Hebrew people had come to believe, wrongly as it turned out, that God cared only for them. They viewed the Gentiles as outside and beyond the promises of God but the new Christian Church had a new Christian message that declared that in Jesus Christ, the Gentiles had and were being brought close to God! Amazing! Amazing grace! Amazing grace for all!

There is a story that comes out of Poland from during the Second World War. Poland was then and still is, by and large a Roman Catholic nation. It happened that in a particular village there was a man who was well known for his care and compassion for others and who was deeply loved because of it. He was not a particularly wealthy man, nor was he a native of the village, nor did he attend the village church. In fact he was not even baptized. But both before and during the War he was known for his good works within the village that he had adopted as his place to live and work. If a stranger came to the village and needed a place to stay, this man would offer a cot in his little home. If a family ran out of food, he always offered a loaf of bread or some flour from his meager supplies. When the village was occupied by the conquering armies, first the Germans and then the Russians he would help hide

the young men of the village if they would otherwise have been imprisoned or drafted into the army. He was loved very much by the villagers on account of all these things and many more.

Eventually the man died and the villagers prepared his body for burial and proceeded to the village church where they asked the Priest to perform the burial service and to bury the man in the church cemetery. The priest, who knew and loved the man as much as did the rest of the villagers agreed that he would conduct the funeral service - but he insisted, despite many pleas from the villagers, that he could not bury the man inside the church cemetery because he was not baptized. "I cannot bury him in our cemetery", the priest said, "It is hallowed ground. He must go where those who are not baptized are buried. Those are the rules of the church and I cannot change them." The villagers appealed even more earnestly to the priest but to no avail. Finally a compromise was reached – the priest agreed to bury the man on church land, near to those who have gone before him but beyond the fence that surrounded the consecrated ground of the cemetery. And so it was. On the appointed day, a grave was prepared, just outside the fence that surrounded the church cemetery. The man's body was carried by the villagers to the site where the priest conducted the ceremony - and then the grave was filled in and a stone placed to mark the spot.

During the night something very beautiful happened. When the priest next went to the church he saw that the fence surrounding the cemetery had been moved by some of the villagers – the fence now encompassed the man's grave.

As we read in Ephesians – “in Jesus Christ you who were once far off have been brought near – you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” As the villagers expanded the fence which enclosed hallowed ground to include the grave of the man whom they loved - so God, through Christ Jesus, has expanded the boundaries of the sacred to include those whom some would deem excluded, surplus, outsiders. In Jesus we see God at work, taking what is and bringing about change, transformation, renewal, redemption. In Jesus we see God welcoming, including, and embracing those who previously were regarded as unwelcome, of no importance, outsiders.

Jesus came to this earth to make alive, real, and personal the love and mercy of God. Jesus came with compassion because we needed love. Jesus continues to come to us in our needs, our worries, our sinfulness, our brokenness, with compassion! Jesus not only comes to each and all of us for our own sake, but Jesus also comes to form us into the Church, the Body of Christ. We should let the text speak for itself, it asserts that it is God who creates, establishes, calls, evokes, and preserves the new humanity called the church. We are here today, in the church, because God has intended us to be here, because God sustains that which God calls, because we are part of how it is that God will reclaim a lost and divided world.

The cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus, with Jesus, from Jesus, upon Jesus that the Church exists, is built and grows. Today's passage from Ephesians speaks of US in the passive tense and God in the active voice. It is God who acts, God calls us here. The first decision is not our decision, the first decision is God's decision for us, to love us, to commit His life for our life. It is God who builds us as parts of this new household. God breaks down the dividing walls between women and men, between the races, and the generations, and every division based on socio-economic class. If you are here in church today, following Jesus, it is because you have been put here by God in Christ!

Your commitment to worshipping God matters!
Your loving outreach to the world on God's behalf matters!
Your relationships with one another and with all people matter!
Your discipleship day by day and week by week matters!
Your support of the Church that together we might live out who God is calling us to be and to become matters!
Worship, Outreach, Discipleship, Relationship, Support matters – they matter to God and so they need and ought to matter to all God's people.

God is active, active in our lives, in the life of the church, in the life of the world. God calls us to practice unity – unity of purpose, unity of love, unity in Christ as our witness to the commitment God has to all people and the entire creation. God is calling us even now to be fully part of this strange, wonderful, divine experiment in human family called "church."

How far are we from God? Not far at all, the epistle reminds us, thanks to Christ. How far are those whom we label as different from us from God? Not far at all, for in Christ the walls that divide are broken down. My friends, we are strangers and aliens no longer, but together we are citizens and members of the household of God, being built together spiritually into a dwelling for God – the God who calls and invites us to live and celebrate and share God's wall-destroying love.

When you get home, check out You Tube or watch again the video of the events of November 9, 1989 – remind yourself of the huge contribution of the Christian Church in West and East Germany to the breaking down of the Berlin wall. Bring to mind the joy and hope of those who climbed over the wall, who took their pickaxes to it, who made larger and larger holes, who squeezed through them and danced through those gaps in the wall, to embrace those from whom they had been divided to forge new friendships and partnerships and as you do so, know that in a yet greater sense this is what God has done for all of us in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God has ended our separation from God, our separation from ourselves, our separation from one another, our separation from our neighbors. Now all previous divisions are at an end and a new community is being cast and created in front of our very eyes.

In Jesus Christ, the wall has fallen, the fence has been moved, the sacrifice has been made, all of us who were far off have been brought into the fellowship of God's people. And all of us have the task of proclaiming and living and practicing a "November 9, 1989" faith – in unity, with mutual respect, devoted to the goal of sharing the reconciling love of the reconciling God with and for all people! This is the task to which you, and you, and you, and you, and all of us have been called – you won't want to miss it, it will make and change your life.

Let these words from Scripture lead and guide you: "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." Amen.