

WEEKLY SERMON

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Responsible Citizenship

From our earliest school days, we learn how to live with difference. This learning comes in many forms and often through the emotional rollercoaster of feeling excluded rather than included.

That said, sometimes we might find ourselves as part of the 'in group' and then discover that we have a certain amount of power over other people, and we can call the shots!

The Apostle Paul, writing from prison to the church in Ephesus, addresses this issue of inclusion and the removing of barriers head-on.

He looks back at the history of Jewish nation, and how those not born into the nation, Gentiles, were stigmatized as the 'uncircumcision'. This identification on the grounds of physical circumcision acted not only as a form of exclusion to the Gentiles but also as a form of self-elevation on the part of the Jewish nation. They were better than others!

Paul refutes this and goes on to explain that through Jesus those on the outside have been brought in and those things that have been built to separate have been broken down. The purpose being to restore peace to those who were outside and to restore peace to those who were within (see verse 17).

What Jesus achieved on the cross was reconciliation. He opened up the ancient pathway for all people to find peace and blessing from God. That was always God's intention from the very beginning of time post-Noah! Through Abraham all the families of the earth shall be blessed (read Genesis 12:1-4).

Abraham was very much connected to the outsider, the alien, the marginalised – that through his people they might find the blessing of God. Unfortunately, that mandate to bless became corrupted, evolving into a segregated nation seeking to keep themselves pure and holy.

The key verse of the passage is v19

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God

How we perceive ourselves is important. Paul describes a new identity – we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints. It is this understanding that should inform how we live as Christian people and drive our mission and ministry in churches across Lancashire.

The church has often set up human rules which have resulted in dividing people and driving some away. How can you reflect the more generous character of God in your own life?

How can you help your church increasingly become a place of blessing? Paul rehearses in this letter a way of living which is dynamite if taken seriously.

And are there areas of your church life that need light shining on them, so as to enable a more holistic understanding of how to be a responsible citizen in God's kingdom?

Very Rev Peter Howell-Jones, The Dean of Blackburn Cathedral

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES