

Series: Because of Christ Week 5

Scripture: Ephesians 2.11-21

Value: We pursue multicultural unity under the name of Jesus.

Date: January 31, 2021

Before we get into our message today I want to encourage you to take advantage of GroupLink today.

If you are online, let me say two things: first, every week right now I'm meeting people who have been attending worship online, just like you. And they are making the transition to being here in person. Just last week I met a woman who came by herself...which is super courageous...she'd been coming online and was finally ready to meet others. By the way Jessica it was awesome to meet you! Ya'll We LOVE that kind of courageous step. Because we want you to be involved in the community here and that involves being known. So this is me extending the invitation again to you. Maybe that's all you needed was one more little nudge to say COME ON! I also want you to know we do have community group(s)? that meet virtually and you can join one today!

Listen right now about half of you are in a community group here at Mercy Church. And groups are the way we care for and love one another. The context where we minister to one another. It's our care and discipleship hub. So here's the deal. We need to emerge from this pandemic *TOGETHER* as the body of Christ. Let a lesson be that complete isolation is not what God created you for. You were made for friendship, you were made to be a body part that helps the local church body function as God intended it, and you need friends who will

help you follow Jesus. So I want to plead with you, get in a community group. I'm not saying it will make all your dreams come true. Just a bunch of sinners LIKE YOU. But, we are going to help each other take next steps as disciples of Jesus. So if you haven't taken that step here at mercy I want to encourage you to join the many who will be taking that step with you. My wife and I just started a new group which means new friendships and we are getting through that awkwardness and already it's been really good for us. So I want to urge you to get in a group today during GroupLink.

Ok. On to the sermon. If you have your bible – Ephesians 2. Today we are going to talk about God's design for the local church. The community I just mentioned.

When I was just beginning in pastoral ministry I was assigned two funerals within a very short time. The first was for an elderly white woman who had been a founding member of the church I was serving at. The funeral was what I expected. What I had experienced growing up. Somber, quiet, you could hear a few sniffles but everyone kept their emotions together. A couple of songs were sung, I gave a brief sermon, and then we left. Brief, short affair that made sense to me. The next funeral was for an Ethiopian man who had been a part of our church for a couple of years. His family asked me to do the funeral. I was the only white person in a room of about 200 people. This was a new experience for me. Ethiopians grieve *differently* than White Americans. I was not ready. There was something called *WAILING*. There was a lack of order to the service. I can't tell you how many people took the stage. I wasn't sure when I was supposed to go up. I mean

ya'll I felt SO out of place. And afterward the entire body of attenders were invited to a meal and it was assumed I would eat with them and basically this was an all-day thing. The outpouring of emotion was bizarre...but also...cathartic. While it was uncomfortable...it was comforting.

And months later I'm talking to a black friend of mine at lunch and say man, you are never going to believe this Ethiopian experience I had. And I explain it all and he is smiling and just says man, you weren't just at an Ethiopian funeral, you were at a black funeral. And we started talking about not just funerals but the church. And how I was able to understand 1 Thessalonians 4 – grieve with hope – through experiencing grief with brothers and sisters from another culture. And we talked about how much more of God and his word we could understand if we lived LIFE alongside brothers and sisters IN Christ but from different cultural backgrounds. I realized a couple of things: virtually all of my Christian experience had been confined to God's redemptive work...in one culture. I'm thankful, but I realized I was missing out on something I could know or experience about God through his redemptive work in other cultures than my own. TWO – The scriptures tell me Christ created and calls for a multi-cultural church.

And while this may occur in certain parts of the world...in our day and in our context... multicultural Christian brotherhood in the local church is in short supply. But I believe there is a great gift that God has given us in the gospel, a redemptive reconciliation across ethnic and cultural boundaries...that we simply have to receive. Today we are going to talk about it.

This series is called "Because of Christ." Where we are talking about our 5-year vision as a church. Our 5-year vision is **Because of Christ, Mercy Church is devoted to becoming a maturing, multiplying, multicultural church.** 6-week series. Week 1 was the vision, and each of the next 5 weeks we are unveiling a ministry value we operate by to help us realize this vision. This week the ministry value I'm sharing with you is: **Because of Christ, we pursue multicultural unity under the name of Jesus**

And let me say one last thing as a pretext. This is the one sermon where Christians may be tempted to think Culture, not scripture, is driving the church. Because culture values multi-cultural unity maybe the church is being tempted to go where culture is. I HOPE everything I say today is a plain and clear exposition of Scripture. Nothing I'm saying today is new. In fact, it is about 1600 years older than America. My agenda is not to make us palatable to culture but instead to make us glorifying to God. That is always my agenda with you church. And I share this with you full of hope and anticipation. Everything I say should be full of hope but some of it may be uncomfortable. But following Jesus is not a journey into comfort. It's a journey of discomfort as we are conformed to his image for his glory. And much like braces hurt as they align the teeth, so God's word sometimes hurts as it aligns our hearts. But we are better for it.

So let's everybody take a deep breath. Calm down. This is God's word for God's church. **Pray**
11 So, then,

The so is especially crucial here. SO is another way of saying therefore. Because of what I just said. And what he just said is one of the clearest presentations of the gospel in scripture.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! -- Ephesians 2:4-5

SO then – Because of Christ. You hear that church? We can never assume the gospel because Paul doesn't ASSUME the gospel. He directly ties the calling he is about to give the church to our unmerited gift of salvation in Christ. This whole series what I'm trying to show you is we are who we are and we do what we do BECAUSE OF CHRIST! And we never stop celebrating that. And the work ahead of us...the good works...is what God has prepared ahead of time for us to do. God is with us and has gone ahead of us. Love that. That's so helpful as I read this passage.

11 So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh — called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands.

12 At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.

There was a time when you were without Christ. You were not a part of God's people. God's people were identified by the act of circumcision...which is an act done in the flesh by human hands. When people were either born into Israel or were grafted in...they had to be circumcised as a rite of entry. And it was only the circumcised who had hope. And Paul is

saying ok REMEMBER something. Remember that there was a time you were lost. And you were in this world without hope and without God.

Because if you will remember that, it helps give you perspective that perhaps we too easily forget. That there was a time we were far from Christ. See he's making sure we understand the true dividing line between groupings of people. The deepest division in the world is WITH HOPE and WITHOUT HOPE. WITH GOD and WITHOUT GOD. ADAM & EVE were with God. They sin, and they are sent outside of the garden. To wander without hope. That is what sin does to us. It sets us far apart from God. There is a CHASM too wide for you to overcome that exists between those two and GOD has brought you from the people WITHOUT hope to the people WITH HOPE.

13 But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

In CHRIST. See. What are we...4 verses removed from where he just said this and he says it again? Yes. Because he's going to say something hard so he soaks it in the gospel. Which is why we are trying to stay SOAKED in the gospel here. So whatever we do has the aroma of Christ (2 Cor 2). In Christ...BY THE BLOOD OF Jesus...this is the gospel. Jesus' blood was shed as a payment for your sin and mine. Our sin debt that separated us from God has been paid BY the blood of Jesus. The redeeming work of Jesus should be on your mind right now. In your mind's eye. And now remaining IN Christ...you have been brought near. And the question is near to what or to whom? And the answer is First God the father,

but secondly is that gentiles are brought near to Jews. Two different ethnic groups are brought near to each other.

14 For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility.

He, Jesus, is our peace. And he didn't make a people where both groups are now...two groups near each other. No, in fact he didn't even graft the gentiles into Israel. Instead, he made both groups one. One. You see that? Oneness in Christ that we are talking about today and that we are pursuing as a church. It is first and foremost a theological issue, not a social one. Under the name of Jesus – HE our savior messiah king – remember last week we said he is claiming all authority under heaven and earth? HE is our peace. He made two groups one...gonna go even further in on that in a moment...AND he tore down the dividing wall of hostility. Hostility existed between Jew & Gentile. He ripped it down.

In fact, his prayer right before he goes to the cross, recorded in John 17, is FATHER I pray that they will be ONE, just as you and I are ONE, make them ONE. So that the world may believe that you sent me. IT is the EMBRACING AND VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF OUR ONENESS that speaks to the watching world.

In his flesh, 15 he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace.

In his flesh – The law of circumcision made by the flesh of human hands...Christ nullified through HIS perfect flesh. He made the circumcision law to be of no effect. SO THAT he

might CREATE IN HIMSELF...IN CHRIST...UNDER THE NAME OF Jesus...one NEW MAN from the two. Not Gentile becoming Jew but Jew and Gentile becoming a new thing...A new thing called THE CHURCH! And the result – peace.

16 He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. Jew & Gentile were reconciled to God in one body. The Jews had hostility toward the gentiles because the Jews thought they had privileged access to God & unless the gentiles conformed they could not be grafted in. They were trying to make gentile Christians also conform to Jewish cultural norms. The gentiles had hostility & resentment toward the Jews and Paul is saying Jesus went up on the cross and died and with his death so the reason for hostility died.

This is why Paul rebukes Peter when Peter, recorded in Galatians 2, when Peter was eating with some gentiles. God had shown Peter in Acts 10 that the gentiles were being brought into the church. God's gospel was for them as well. So Peter preaches to some gentiles, they get saved. And they are eating together having fun. But then some Jewish Christians show up...And they are like...Peter don't eat with THOSE PEOPLE. You are a JEWISH Christian. And Peter...despite his vision from God and his experience with the gentile Christians...he walked away from them under the pressure of the Jewish Christians. In deference to the cultural preferences of his own race, he discredited the message of the gospel that God had so graphically conveyed to him earlier. And Paul called him out on it. No one, not even an apostle, is excused for placing culture above Christ, or race above righteousness.

God's standard reigns supreme, and cultural preferences are to be denounced when a Christian fails to submit to God's standard. Scripture, and only the scripture, is the final authority by which racial relationships are determined.¹

17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Those Gentiles who were far from God – he proclaimed peace between you and God. To those Israelites who were near – He proclaimed the good news of peace also! BOTH got the same news!

Now again, translate to us today we of different cultures are all gentiles Christ has brought near. Unless you are Jewish. And if you are Jewish...you are granted peace by God through the same good news I am!

18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

We both...regardless of our ethnicity and culture...have access in ONE Spirit to the Father. There is no Gentile holy spirit nor Jewish Holy Spirit. Just the Holy Spirit. There is no Black Holy Spirit or White Holy Spirit or Asian Holy Spirit or Hispanic Holy Spirit. There is ONE Holy Spirit who grants us access to ONE heavenly father. We are ONE people. Look...

19 So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,

Gentiles – you are no longer foreigners and strangers. You have a new identity. This is the identity of the Church! You are

fellow citizens with the saints...

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light -- 1 Peter 2:9

You and I have a new citizenship. And our Heavenly Citizenship must take first priority over our earthly citizenship. Our primary allegiance lies with GOD and with his Church. So we are more bound to one another in Christ than we are to our ethnicity and culture of origin. Tony Evans, a pastor out in Dallas TX says in his book *Oneness Embraced* that this means if we are citizens of heaven first...that we should not think of ourselves as White Christians or Black Christians or Asian Christians or Hispanic Christians. In these descriptions *Christian* is a noun modified by an adjective – black, white, etc. However, our Christianity should modify our culture. We should see ourselves as Christian Whites, Christian Blacks, Christian Asians, Christian Hispanics.

And more than that... We are in the same household. WE ARE FAMILY. And the great sin of the American church in the 20th century was not living out the implications of that term FAMILY. Dr. King in his letter from a Birmingham jail said his great disappointment was not the white terrorist groups like the KKK...not it was the passivity of white pastors. Who Could recite magnificent sermons yet ignore their FAMILY who were suffering the oppression of Jim Crow. We are one people, but more tightly we are one family. We must love each other like family.

¹ Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced* (Moody Chicago, Ill 2011)

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. -- Ephesians 2:11-22 (CSB)

How we pursue multicultural unity under the name of Jesus

- Pursue Robust Theology centered on the gospel
 - Genesis 1 tells me people were made in God's image.
 - 27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. -- Genesis 1:27
 - No qualifier to what kinds of people so all people are owed dignity.
 - Genesis 3 tells me mankind has the same sin problem. I know that because Romans 5 tells me through one man's sin, death came to All people. ALL.
 - 12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned. -- Romans 5:12
 - So we ALL have the same problem. We are ALL sinners in need of saving.
 - Genesis 11 tells the story of the tower of babel. Where people tried to get unity & power TOGETHER. AS ONE. but apart from God and

God said NO. Because that wasn't true unity, it was alliance made to obtain power. Those crumble when u get it. true unity is only possible through a common identity as God's children.

- Genesis 12 tells me though that God's promise to Abraham is that he will be the father of many nations. And that he will be the father not of simply a bloodline, but the father of FAITH. I know that because Romans 4 tells me his FAITH is what God credited to him as righteousness. & that FAITH is what brings someone into God's family regardless of their ethnicity. Even a descendant of Scots-Irish highlanders like me – bout as far from Mediterranean Hebrews as you can get - CAN GET IN ON GOD'S saving grace THROUGH FAITH. So that tells me I'm going to have brothers from another mother.
- And The story of the Israelites shows me God grafting in non-Jews. The story of Jonah shows me a God who loves the nations, even those who seem to be most opposed to him. The Psalms talk about the nations coming to him and ALL PEOPLES Psalm 96 ascribing GLORY to God together. Isaiah shows me the messiah who all nations come to bow down at and a house of prayer that will be for all PEOPLES. Not just a bunch of Jewish individuals, but the text says ALL PEOPLES. In fact, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the

Septuagint Isaiah 56.7 says “panta ta ethne” the same phrase Jesus uses in the Great Commission. ALL PEOPLES.

- Look at the new testament - Jesus goes OUT to the Samaritan woman. Jesus redraws family identity lines around who follows him & who doesn't. Jesus calls for one-ness, this time one-ness IN HIM... to be the witness of the gospel to the watching world. Then Acts 2 the holy spirit comes on the church and INSTANTLY they prophecy in multiple languages. Instantly right in the very first church...its multicultural. One ethnicity – Jew, but from vastly different cultures across the known world. Because when God reconciles vertically he reconciles horizontally. I see Peter's vision of the gentile given the promise of the gospel in Ephesians 10. So now ALL PEOPLE isn't just Ethnic Jews from all cultures. It's All ethnicities and all cultures. I see this passage in Ephesians, I see Paul's rebuke of Peter's racism in Galatians. I see Galatians 3 where there is neither slave nor free, Greek nor Jew...all are one IN CHRIST. 1 Peter – Holy Race. A whole new people created. And I see John's vision of heaven. Where in revelation 5 Christ is going to gather a people from among PEOPLES. Where Revelation 21.3 people translate God will be with them and they will be his people...its actually translated PEOPLES. Plural. People

Groups dwelling together with GOD. Which is what makes Revelation 9 so good...

- 9 After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! - Revelation 7:9-10
- How did he know there were people from every nation & tribe? He saw color! And I know Jesus tells me to pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. And the church is his demonstration community.
- The gospel is the fact I have been vertically reconciled to God and horizontally reconciled to others IN CHRIST. And scripture repeatedly makes sure I understand that this means reconciled to those from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. TO believe this... and not flesh this out in the horizontal relationships...is antithetical to the gospel. A WHOLISTIC theology of the gospel will -if you dive as deep as you can go...I mean dive...and if you do...should result in more conviction to love your neighbor as yourself. To represent the kingdom of God here on earth.
- So we will continue to pursue a robust theology of the gospel here. Keeping the gospel at the center WILL challenge us to be a multicultural church. We will

continue to hold equipping courses and forums like we have done. We've got one coming up this summer to help you embrace the beauty of ONENESS in Christ.

- **Pursue Relational Depth**

- We need to make friends with one another across ethnic and cultural boundaries. The church isn't just a gathering...it's a people who live life with one another. Therefore, this calling isn't just to sit near someone from a different ethnic and cultural background but to pursue relationships with one another. It's to know one another so well that we experience the JOY of their culture but their culture or ethnicity is not the totality of how we see them.
- This will result in the need for LOTS of grace and lots of humility with one another. To white brothers and sisters this will mean listening. 2 ears & one mouth. Listen twice as much as you speak.
- When we do this...that's where some blinders get lifted. For example: growing up I thought being "colorblind" was a virtue. "I don't see color; I just see people." And I meant well. It was a sentiment that sought to value the individual. But...the more I got to know people of color the more I learned how offensive it was. Because my words to them were "I see past your color." As if something was wrong with their color.

- Brothers and sisters of color I say this with as much humility as I can – you cannot write off your white brothers and sisters the minute they say or do something that offends you. "That's white people for you" is not a gospel approach. You must also assume the best in your white brothers and sisters. You are pioneers right now in our church. And that will require thick skin and grace as we grow into the church of our theology.

- **Pursue Gospel Discomfort**

- 19 Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law. 21 To those who are without the law, like one without the law — though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ — to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. 23 Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings. -- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (CSB)
- Paul BECAME like others. He immersed himself into their lives. He would be eating kosher one day and DRY RUB SMOKED RIBS the next day.

He didn't lose his own identity though. He went out of his way to find entry points into the lives of ALL peoples for the sake of the gospel. He was uncomfortable.

- On a church wide level this means we need to have the humility to welcome CULTURAL expressions not just ethnic attendance.
- Multiethnic I mean Christians from different ethnic backgrounds. Black & White & Asian & Hispanic. But you can be multi-ethnic and monocultural. You can have people from different ethnic backgrounds show up in a church but assimilate into the majority culture. So then like a bag of M&Ms we may have different colors but there is only one flavor. What we want instead is to be a church where brothers and sisters of different ethnicities bring their culture with them and we will get more of God as the gospel is brought to bear and then made visible through the various cultures.
- This means evaluating all of our ministries here to see how we can best shepherd a multicultural church. SO, we are launching The Mercy Church Race and Ethnicity Council later this year. This group will be made up of mercy members from all ethnicities who will pray, discuss, evaluate, and ultimately make recommendations for how we can take positive steps towards our goal of becoming a multicultural church.

Closing –