

Reflection for Sunday 18th July 2021
Ephesians 2: 11-22

No longer...

I cannot really remember the number of times I have referred to the dichotomy of “Us-Them”, and how our faith needs to create the reality of being “Us”. It is certainly one of my mantras, one which gives meaning to my faith journey. And in the reading today, we find a similar understanding of that idea: it mentions those who were near and those who were far away: those who were uncircumcised, and as such separated, and those who were part of...and then the amazing reality: BUT NOW... but now those who were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

We live in a world which seems to thrive on divisions, the different, the “not like us”, the far away, the ‘Them’ and we are called to recognise that in our faith we are called to belong to something new, something inclusive, accepting, loving, recognizing of differences, and thanking God that we are a new creation in Christ – who has made the two one, making peace and bringing reconciliation. What a surprise this reading is, because it goes against so much that we are used to. To those who questioned the ‘taking a knee and the BLM’ protests, what happened after the match last Sunday, makes it crystal clear why those were not empty gestures, but rather calls to a much needed changed in our society.

I remember when quite a few years ago, I was attending an Executive Committee meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Tondano, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. I was invited to preach at a small Reformed Church, where all was naturally in their language and my preaching was in English and so was translated into their language. I asked them not to translate the prayers, because it would break the moment, and you don’t need to know what is said, because the Spirit will interpret and guide. Having said that, I was surprised because there was only one word I did recognize: they kept repeating “Allah”, so at the end of the service I asked, to me that was the Islamic way for talking about God, so it was a “Them” word, not an “Us” word, and to my shame, I was told that it is the Arab word for God, and their language had Arab influences. And that taught me a lesson of sharing, of coming together, of being one.

And since then, each time I read this passage of the letter to the Ephesians I remember what God teaches us, the oneness of the family God has created; one family where we are all very different, thanks be to God for that! Peace to those who are far away and peace to those who are near- **no longer foreigners and aliens.** And it is this which has become the corner stone of the construction of faith which I preach and share.

This is why I was so horrified when after the football match last Sunday, the intensity of racism was expressed, just as at General Assembly we had agreed the path for the URC going from being “non-racist” to being “anti-racist”. And in the light of the reading today, the language of racism, sexism, discrimination, and all other ‘isms’ is totally unacceptable, and must be denounced, no matter who uses it. We are all part of this new reality, even when before we were far off, not near, because “in Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord...we are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

This then, is our calling, this is the way we follow, this is the message we share. No longer those Far Away, no longer Them, no longer anything which diminishes life. A new creation where near and far meet, *together*, and where God lives by this Spirit. I think we have a lot to do yet on this construction, don’t you? Amen.