

Closing the Gaps
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
June 6, 2010

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First Christian Church
Second Sunday After Pentecost

I bring you love and warm fraternal greetings from Ghana in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. I also bring you special greetings from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the entire membership of the E.P. Church and the staff and students of the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary, Peki, of which I am the Principal. They all wish you God's continued guidance in all your undertakings.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your friendship and support to the E.P. Seminary over the years, especially for your financial assistance that enabled us to purchase an electric generator for the Seminary. We appreciate your generosity very much. Thank you.

I am also grateful to the Lord, to your pastor, and to all of you, for inviting me to fellowship with you today and to preach the day's sermon. I hope my presence here today will re-energize our existing relationship and bring about further cooperation between the E.P. Church and your church.

The theme for our reflection is: "Closing the Gaps" based on the reading from 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. The text read from 2 Cor. 5:17 is one of my favorites in the bible when it comes to reflecting on the status of Christians and our calling to be ambassadors of Christ Jesus in reconciling the world to God. Because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ,

Christians are brand new people on the inside. The Holy Spirit gives us new life, and we are not the same any more. We are not reformed, rehabilitated, or re-educated—we are re-created, a new creation living in vital union with Christ and in reconciling the world to God.

While this newness is true individually St. Paul is saying much more. Not only are we changed from within, but also God reconciles us to himself by blotting out our sins and making us right with him. When we trust in Christ, we are no longer God's enemies, or strangers to him, and to one another. Because we have been reconciled to God, we have the privilege of encouraging others to do the same, and thus Christians are those who have the calling and the task of reconciling others to God.

To put it another way, we have been given the task and the calling to close the gaps created by human sinfulness. It is in light of this Paul proclaims to Christians in Rome in Romans 14:19 and to us, our Christian call of “unity with Christ and with each other for Peace and Mutual Up-building.”

Unity with Christ and with each other for Peace and Mutual Up-building in the world community means reconciliation, building bridges, closing gaps and other artificial barriers that separate us from each other as people created in the image of God to live in harmony in God's world.

The sad fact about our world today which all of us must be concerned about is the growing gaps, and the deep divisions between and among peoples. In some contexts this can be a matter of life and death. News around the world tells of people being wounded or killed, made homeless and refugees or illegal immigrants because they were from the wrong nation, tribe, or group, and in the wrong place at the wrong time. There are growing gaps between developed and developing nations, old and young, black and white, between and among religious tribes and ethnic groups. In sum, human history is full of conflict, wars, unequal development, segregation, and apartheid—the glaring reality of human disunity.

In context, the Bible offers another visionary picture, of one human family. That does not imply a situation where everyone is the same, for the bible asserts diversity and does how ways we might close gaps and live together. It is a dynamic family and way of life where we are not called to be uniform, but equal in the way God sees and relates to us all.

The birth of Jesus Christ into the world, his life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, has bridged if not closed the gaps and barriers that existed in us, through us, among us, and between us as individuals and as nations. The mission and ministry of Jesus Christ have closed the racial, gender, tribal, economic, educational and all other gaps. This is why Paul can boldly proclaim to

Galatians Christians and to us today that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor master, male nor female. We are all sons and daughters of God.

God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit continues to call us to a new oneness, empowered by God's Spirit, which transcends all boundaries and separations and unites us in our relationships to one another and with God. Indeed, the survival of humanity and the created world depends upon our collective effort in closing gaps for unity with Christ Jesus and with each other for Peace on earth and Mutual Up-building in all our undertakings.

This is obvious because in spite of the high and unprecedented development in the world today, in the fields of trade and commerce, science, medicine communication and information technology, our human problems remain the same. We still live in sin and fear of all kinds of violence, hatred, war, injustice, pride, selfishness, oppression of all kinds, discriminations and unhealthy competitions. The irony of all these is that in an age of abundant information and communication technology, globalization and open market economy, the poor are getting poorer and the rich, richer.

Never in the history of the world has the gap between the rich and the poor, developed and the developing nations, young and the old and even

Christians denominations so wide as it is today; despite our pride and arrogance begin in a new and more civilized age with a collective pledge of one world, “justice and freedom for all.”

- We live in a world of abundance of food and many natural resources and yet over 1.2 billion people in the world live on less than a dollar a day.
- Even in a wealthy country like America over 32.3 million people live below the poverty line.
- It is difficult to eliminate barriers and close gaps when the United States, which has 6% of the world’s population control over 59% of the wealth of the world.
- Everyday over 24,000 people die from hunger and other preventable causes; 18,000 of them are ages 5 and under. According to Oxfam, an international agency for reducing hunger and poverty in the world, if food was distributed equally, every man, woman and child would receive 2,700 calories a day, more than the minimum needed for basic survival.
- Again it is heart breaking in a world of abundance when over 125 million children today do not have basic education and more than 150 million have dropped out of school before they can read or write. Again, over 27.6% of adults (that is 1.2 billion) in the developing world, including my country, Ghana, are illiterate.

- In all these, the world needs about \$50 billion (about 1% of the world's income) which would provide access to basic education, nutrition, reproductive health, family planning, safe drinking water, and sanitation for all, which will go a long way to close the widening gap of poverty in the world and to create a better living condition for all.

In spite of the urgent need to build bridges in a marginalized world, many developed nations are more interested in building their military budgets, and spending more on armaments instead of using resources in eradicating poverty for a better living condition, protection, and security for all.

The good news is that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. It was the world that God so loved, it was not just a particular people or nation; it was not just the good people; it was not only the people who loved God, but the world. God loves the poor and the rich, blacks and whites, Muslims and Christians, Hindus and Buddhists, Israel and Palestinians, Iraqis and Americans, foreigners and nationals. God loves all of us and blessed us all. The world has a relationship with a God who first seeks us not because of “who” we are or what we “have” or what we can “achieve” by and for ourselves but out of love. This is the loving relationship that we have been called to, to lovingly seek the other and reconcile them to God.

We are called to close all human made gaps that drive us from God and from each other and be reconciled to God and to each other.

Friends, the Scripture continuously exhorts us that reconciling people, closing gaps, eliminating barriers and building bridges in the world is letting the oppressed go free, sharing food with the hungry, caring for the homeless, and the poor, clothing the naked; recovering of sight to the blind and the like. These and other ministries that we are currently undertaking will go a long way to close gaps and secure for us a better world for all.

When your church donated money to us to buy our generator and light the darkness around us at the Seminary, you were in ways closing gaps.

- When we donate to Haiti victims of earthquake, organize food pantry and build houses of the under-privileged, we are in many ways closing gaps and building bridges.
- When we are our knowledge, talents, time and wealth to improve the living condition of others, we are reconciling people, closing gaps, eliminating barriers and building bridges for a better and secure world for all.
- Again, when we mourn with those who are mourning and rejoice with those who are rejoicing, we are closing gaps and building bridges to the glory of God and edification of humanity.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, our world is in search of true justice, peace, love and naturally caring community of people. Let us therefore be bold and ready to sacrifice our talent, knowledge, wealth, time, and our very life to close gaps, eliminate barriers, and build bridges in our communities for a better and prosperous world for all.

Every one of us can make a difference in closing gaps and building bridges. The God from whom we come, unto whom we return, and in whom we live and move and have our being has met us in Christ and continues to meet us in mercy, grace, true justice, judgment, and love. With the ever-present Holy Spirit to guard and guide us, we can and we shall overcome all the evil forces that divide us from a better peaceful and loving world. Because Christ lives we shall also live. In the name of God, the Creator, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.