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Acts 10:34-11:18

Outward Church: Bridges to Multiethnic Reconciliation

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Last week I talked about *Barriers to Multiethnic Reconciliation* (i.e., personal & systemic racism, group pressure and personal vulnerability). This week I want to talk about how we can overcome those barriers by building bridges, so my sermon title this week is *Bridges to Multiethnic Reconciliation*. My big idea is this... *Be bridge builders in a world of walls.*

In March 1965 several of Martin Luther King Junior's associates, one of them Representative John Lewis who died this past summer, led a group of demonstrators across a bridge. They intended to walk to Montgomery 54 miles away as a way of protesting their lack of voting rights. When they got to the other side of the bridge they were told to turn back by a wall of officers. When the demonstrators tried to speak with them they were shoved, knocked to the ground, beaten with nightsticks, attacked with tear gas, and pursued on horseback. Many of them were seriously injured. They did not fight back.

Two days later on "Turnaround Tuesday" Martin Luther King Junior himself began to lead a march across the bridge. But due to a court order he turned the crowd around. It wasn't until the third and final try that they successfully marched across the bridge and to Montgomery. The events of Selma spurred President Lyndon Johnson to pass the voting rights bill to protect the rights of African Americans to vote.

That bridge, the *Edmund Pettus Bridge*, has become a civil rights monument. Every year crowds, activists, and politicians gather to re-enact the walk across the bridge. It has become a place to remember, to heal, and to overcome.

Today I want to talk about the bridges the Bible gives us for overcoming racism. We begin our journey across this bridge by first recognizing there is a personal and systemic racism problem within our culture. But once we've recognized there's a problem, it's time to do something about it.

Acts 10 and 11 offer us a glimpse of multiethnic reconciliation between Jew and Gentile (non-Jew). An angel appears to a Gentile named Cornelius, a Roman soldier, to go and get Peter. He sends for Peter who likewise receives a vision of animals. The Lord lowers a sheet full of unclean and clean animals before Peter and tells him to take and eat. Although Peter initially refuses, he hears the Spirit tell him to go and meet with Cornelius, a Gentile, and preach the gospel, so he obeys. Peter goes and preaches the gospel across cultures to people who Jewish tradition said were unclean (Mishnah Oholot 18:6). In so doing he models for us how to be a bridge to multiethnic reconciliation. That's what we need today. With all the strife and division we need some way to come together and find healing. How can we help as Christians? *Be bridge builders in a world of walls.* Today we're looking at **5 bridges to multiethnic reconciliation:**

Bridge 1: The Lordship of Christ

Peter has arrived, Cornelius welcomes him into his home, and now he speaks.

Acts 10:34-36 (ESV)

34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

Our God doesn't show "partiality." That means God doesn't play "favorites." Anyone can enter into a relationship with him through Jesus Christ, who verse 36 says is "Lord of all." God welcomes all who believe in his son Christ Jesus. Jesus is not just King of the Jews, but is Lord of all (even the Gentiles).

Jesus' lordship gives us hope, but should also strike fear in our hearts. At the end of his gospel presentation Peter talks about who Jesus is—that one day he is going to return in judgment.

Acts 10:42 (ESV)

And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

Jesus doesn't show partiality (c.f., Deut 10:17) because he is a fair and just judge. One day he will judge mankind. This means we need to take Jesus really seriously. He's not to be messed with or trifled. And that means we need to take multiethnic reconciliation seriously. If we ignore the problem, or actively oppose it, Jesus takes notice. He is Lord of all and does not approve of his people playing favorites. Jesus leaves no room for tribalism or nationalism, only oneness in Jesus (Gal 3:28).

If we don't deal with the racism in our hearts, we'll have to answer to Jesus (Matt 25:31-46). Likewise, if we ignore the systemic racism in our culture, we'll have to answer to Jesus for that too. The Lordship of Jesus and the final judgment gives his commandments teeth. We are to be agents of reconciliation. We can't ignore the problem. His holiness won't allow it. Like Jesus, we're not to play favorites. It's so easy to pick a side and vilify the other. We're not to stand on one shore and attack the other shore. Somehow, as Christians, we're supposed to figure out how to build a bridge of reconciliation between the two.

Christ's Lordship also gives us confidence that he will make it happen. Jesus will reconcile all people in himself. We get to hope in that and work towards it. We need to take it seriously, yet trust he'll make it happen. *The first bridge to multiethnic reconciliation is recognizing the Lordship of Christ.*

Bridge 2: Hospitality

We can be hospitable. We can invite people into our home and share a meal and conversation with them. Remember what Peter did when he first met Cornelius's Gentile servants?

Acts 10:23a

So he invited them in to be his guests...

When Peter goes to Caesarea, he enters Cornelius' home. Jews weren't supposed to go inside of Gentiles homes. It was considered unclean but he did it anyways. And he gets kick back, just like Jesus got blasted for eating and drinking with "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:16). So does Peter.

Acts 11:2-3 (ESV)

2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3 "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

They criticize him. That means they oppose him, take issue with him, judge him. Peter does the right thing. He eats and drinks with Gentiles, and he gets attacked for it. Ever done the right thing and gotten criticized for it? Peter has. Sharing a meal with others is really important in Jewish culture. It was a mark of fellowship, of acceptance and unity. The circumcision group didn't want that with non-Jews.

To be a Christian means to spend time with people who are completely culturally different than you, maybe over a meal or drinks or at the playground. We build bridges by getting out of our comfort zone.

- If you're someone who opposes Black Lives Matter (BLM), you could invite someone who supports it over for dinner, not so you can tell them what to think, but so that you can listen to their story.
- If you're someone who is angry with police, you could sign up for a ride-along with a local police officer and ask them how they feel about everything going on today.
- If you're a President Trump supporter, you could invite someone who you know appreciates Biden over for a friendly conversation. If you're a Biden supporter, you could invite a Trump supporter over.
- If you're a Dunkin Donuts drinker, you could invite a Starbucks fan out to coffee, at Dunks...

As Christians, we're to be salt and light. That means responding completely differently than the world responds. We just had the *Democratic National Convention* and the *Republican National Convention*. Now the election is heating up, lines are being drawn in the sand, and sides are being taken. As Christians, we're not to get caught up in the partisanship. If anything, let's make an effort to get to know those with whom we disagree. *Be bridge builders in a world of walls. The second bridge to multiethnic reconciliation is hospitality.*

Bridge 3: Proximity

There's a lot of overlap between proximity and hospitality. With hospitality, we primarily invite and host. But with proximity, we get up and go. We get closer to those who are different than us, closer to social problems, close enough that "them" become "us." Peter went to Cornelius's home. In one sense Peter is the minority culture entering a Gentile town, Caesarea. But on the other hand, Cornelius is a minority military force in a Jewish nation. To be united in the gospel, both needed to get closer to each other.

Bryan Steven did a talk with Timothy Keller on *Grace, Justice, and Mercy*. He said, "There is power in proximity." It's one thing to talk about problems in low-performing schools, it's another to send your kids to those schools. We'll do something like that if it advantages us, but not typically if it costs us. Bryan Stevenson says that when we try and fix problems from a distance, we miss the details and nuances of a problem, and our solutions won't work. He says, "You got to get proximate." Proximity helps us create just policies and programs. Proximity helps us care.

The reason Bryan Stevenson was allowed to go to the public high school was because lawyers came in and insisted the school district follow Brown vs. Board of Education. It was because people got proximate. When he went to law-school at Harvard he almost took a big job that would pay well, but then he took an internship working for a humans rights organization for people on death row. In order to do that job, he had to get proximate. He had to serve people on death row and talk to them face to face. Getting proximate changed his life, which has led to changed lives for countless others. He has freed wrongly condemned people, helped change unjust laws, and argued cases before the supreme court.

As a church, we got to get proximate to other ethnicities and cultures. Maybe that means doing youth group together with a Chinese church or a black church. Maybe it means swapping pulpits with a pastor from an urban church. Maybe it means serving Lawrence or Lowell with another church or doing a joint worship service, or joint potluck. *Be bridge builders in a world of walls. The third bridge to multiethnic reconciliation is proximity.*

Bridge 4: Shalom

I want us to look a little further at the content of Peter's sermon.

Acts 10:36 (ESV)

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

The Greek word for “peace” is the a translation of the Hebrew word “shalom.” But the problem is that “peace” doesn’t quite sum up what Shalom means. In our college group we’ve been talking a lot about Shalom. Shalom isn’t just the absence of conflict, what we normally think of as peace (aka. a time of peace). Rather, shalom is how things ought to be. Shalom is wholeness, completeness, goodness. Shalom is the world made right. So what’s Peter saying here? He’s saying the kind of good news Jesus brings is shalom, whole-life peace and harmony. We see that in our text.

Acts 10:38 (ESV)

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Jesus didn’t just preach the gospel, he went around doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil. He liberated and healed. Part of being a Christian is working toward shalom like Jesus. Shalom is made possible through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Acts 10:39-41 (ESV)

39 And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

1 Corinthians tells us Jesus appeared to over 500 people who can testify they saw him alive after his death (1 Cor 15:1-6). Jesus’ resurrection makes shalom possible. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, but also to redeem all of creation (Romans 8:18-25). His crucifixion wasn’t just a sacrifice, it was an enthronement. That’s where he got his crown of thrones, royal robe, and was declared king of the Jews. After his resurrection he ascended on high and is now ruling and reigning over all of creation, ushering shalom into his world. Even as he does this he is extending grace and mercy so that you and I and our neighbors and communities can experience healing and peace.

Acts 10:43 (ESV)

43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Jesus offers you forgiveness for your sins. He forgives us for all the ways we’ve broken and marred his shalom and gives us the opportunity to be part of the restoration. At his return he will finish what he started, but till then we get to be on his team, ushering in little pockets of shalom in our world. We do this by preaching the gospel, by forgiving others, by reforming broken systems, and by building bridges of reconciliation. We know we won’t achieve complete shalom apart from Christ’s return, but we know the shalom we do create has eternal value. When we build bridges instead of walls, it matters for all eternity.

In Northern Ireland there’s a city that’s so divided part of the population calls it Londonderry and others calls it Derry. In this city Protestants live on the east bank and Catholics on the west bank. Many don’t like to mix; so the solution, was to build a bridge. The new 900 foot bridge curves like a snake and is for walkers, joggers, and cyclists. They named it “Peace Bridge.” That’s what they’re trying to do, build a bridge, build peace. We would call it shalom, life as it should be. *Be bridge builders in a world of walls. The fourth bridge to multiethnic reconciliation is shalom.* The final bridge is...

Bridge 5: The Holy Spirit

None of this is possible without the Holy Spirit. Peter doesn't finish his sermon as the Holy Spirit interrupts him. The Spirit doesn't need for us to finish before he can get started. He's already at work.

Acts 10:44-45 (ESV)

44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.

This moment is like the Gentile Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit comes and fills the Gentiles with his presence, even before they are baptized. We don't know if the Gentile Christians start speaking in other languages like the Jewish believers did at Pentecost, but something happens that clearly shows the Holy Spirit accepts and fills these believers. There is to be no doubt that the Gentiles are just as much in the family as God as the Jews. They share the same Holy Spirit who brings unity and oneness.

If there's one person we need to create multiethnic reconciliation, it's the Holy Spirit. We can't do this alone. We need to follow his leading, his nudging, his direction. Is he nudging you right now? Is he telling you to invite a family over for dinner or to serve other ethnic communities in some way? Don't ignore that. What are our 5 bridges to multiethnic reconciliation?

Bridge 1: The Lordship of Christ

Bridge 2: Hospitality

Bridge 3: Proximity

Bridge 4: Shalom

Bridge 5: The Holy Spirit.

Be bridge builders in a world of walls. In June I preached a sermon in response to George Floyd's death called [A Posture of Listening](#). I felt called to be a better listener to the black community. After that sermon I felt like the Holy Spirit might be leading me to reach out to three of my [Ockenga](#) friends, all women of color, and have a conversation on racism and injustice.

I called my first friend, Cyntoria, just to check in on her, and then I asked her what she thought of having a conversation with our friends Monica, Devon, and me. She liked the idea and reached out to them. They also agreed. The idea was to record the conversation, and if we felt it was worth sharing afterwards, I could publish it on our Facebook page and website. So that's what we did. You may have seen [A Conversation with Friends](#) on our website or Facebook page. If not, please check it out.

Part of the reason I did this was because I wanted them to know I was there to support them, a little like a bridge. I also wanted to be a bridge for our church between cultures, to help us hear from three strong-Christian black women, not those we normally hear from at Cornerstone. We're hoping to have them over for a social-distancing dinner on our deck soon. All I'm trying to do is follow the Holy Spirit's nudging, trying to show hospitality, and working towards proximity, whatever the Lord wants that to look like. What unites us across multiethnic differences is the Lordship of Jesus. He's our Lord. I'm their brother in Christ and they are my sisters in Christ. Together, we're learning what it means to build shalom.

This takes time. It's a journey. This is my story. What's yours? How is the Holy Spirit convicting you to be a bridge to multiethnic reconciliation? You don't have to go to a rally or pick a side to be a bridge. The very

concept of bridge is a place where two sides meet. A bridge brings two sides together and makes relationship possible. As Christians, we have such an opportunity right now to be bridge builders. *Be bridge builders in a world of walls.* Let's pray.

Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What do you know about Selma and the events that happened there?
2. Why is multiethnic reconciliation important?
3. How does the Lordship of Jesus Christ motivate us to build cross-cultural bridges?
4. How can hospitality help us build personal bridges to other ethnicities?
5. How can proximity help us create justice? What are its strengths and potential risks?
6. What is shalom and why is it important?
7. How can we build shalom?
8. How is the gospel greater than just personal forgiveness of sins?
9. What role does the Holy Spirit play in reconciliation?
10. Have you ever ignored the nudging of the Holy Spirit? Why is that? What do you think you missed?
11. What can we do to better obey the Holy Spirit?
12. What's one step you or your ministry team can take to build diversity and create multiethnic reconciliation?