



Reflections on being “reconciled in Christ”

Pam Shellberg, Director of Lifelong Faith Formation

For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us ... so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:14-16

Part of what it means to be human is to have the capacity to create concepts, to distinguish similarities and differences, to analyze and categorize. It’s part of the gift and power of our uniquely human intellect. This capacity serves us in establishing a sense of “self.” We can know, describe, and understand who we are, in part, by the contrast to who we are not. I know what it means to be Christian in part by knowing how I am neither Muslim nor Jew. I saw the Lutheran features of my identity more clearly than ever as a graduate student at a Catholic Jesuit university. I understand the challenges to me as a lesbian in part by understanding how they are faced – or not faced, as often the case may be – by heterosexuals. The distinctions we make are often represented with the help of the backlash: male/female; black/white; rich/poor; have’s/have not’s; citizen/immigrant; straight/gay; Republican/Democrat; Packer fan/Bear fan. The truth is, however, that our capacity for discerning the nuance of complex realities often collapses in that backlash, and we end up dividing vast swaths of diverse humanity into grossly oversimplified binaries. Too often that backlash becomes the dividing wall of hostility of which Paul writes. One of the apostle’s most profound – and challenging! – insights about the power of Christ for us is that through Christ we are brought into a spiritual unity, reconciled to God, no longer catalyzed by the hostilities engendered by the wall of the backlash. Christ was a binary disrupter, bringing unity, peace, and love.

The Rev. Elizabeth M. Edman, author of *Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ People Know About Life and Love and How It Can Revitalize Christianity*, reminds us that the primary truth claims of our Christian tradition resist our human inclination to think in binaries. God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, we say – removing the backlash dividing the divine from the human. Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, we say – his resurrection disrupting the binary of death and life as forces opposing each other. The entire history of Christianity shows how it is possible for any human being to perceive these truths and to be a part of a community that worships this God and follows Jesus’ teachings. The dividing line that first separated people religiously on the basis of tribal, ethnic, or national identities was disrupted by Christ’s message of universal salvation. (We should humbly remember that as Christians, we are non-Jewish benefactors of that disruption!)



As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:27-28

As we live into our identity as a Reconciling in Christ congregation and everything else that our welcome statement expresses, may we be attentive to where we let backslashes influence our thinking and actions. May we understand ourselves – individually and collectively – not in contrast to who we are not, but as members of a spiritual community where we are – individually and collectively – both-and, all-and. What will be the spiritual gift you receive when the dividing wall is broken down?