

“Aliens Brought Near”
Part 2 of Sermon Series: *No Longer Strangers*

a sermon based on
Ephesians 2:11-22

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As we continue this sermon series “*No Longer Strangers*” – if you’re one of those people who look at the sermon title – you look at “*Aliens Brought Near*” and you said, “uh oh” as that dee-dee-dee theme from the *Twilight Zone* played in the back of your mind. What sort of aliens is this new pastor going to be talking about? Is he going to be “too political” or “spacey”?

Well, let me clear it up. Have any of you seen the movie “Men in Black”?? In that movie, the characters played by Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones are special government agents tasked with keeping an I on aliens – the inter-planetary kind.

It’s not always easy. Although those aliens will never be earthlings, they blend in by disguise - rather as a hot dog vendor or little dog. Even though they look like they belong, they really don’t.

Those aren’t the kinds of aliens, we’re going to talk about today. Webster’s dictionary has its first definition for the noun *alien*, “a person of a different family, race or nation.” Did you catch that? The first part of that first definition of an alien is “a person of a different family.” Here in this place – aliens have been brought near. Scharztes near Whitlocks near Layngs...

But that’s not how we talk about this place. Is it? It’s not how we talk about who we are together. Is it? We come together, here, with a sense of family gathering. Right? So what gives?

Our human tendency is to look for and identify differences – to look for who’s in and who’s out. I am a member of ICER (Illinois Christians Encountering Racism) – the anti-racism team for the Illinois Conference of Churches. In fact, I’m one of the original members. I was the one tasked to go before that ecumenical body standing before a United Methodist bishop, an Armenian Orthodox bishop, a Greek Orthodox bishop, Roman Catholic and Lutheran bishops, Quaker leaders, and Presbyterian executive to encourage them to make our work a priority for the ICC. And it is.

One of the things that we go back to in ICER is that race – is just a social construct. Biologically – except for those really close family relationships, each of you has the same diversity of genes whether you’re sitting here in Cherry Valley, or whether you were sitting in a church in China, India or Ethiopia. It’s a fact... but...

That human tendency to see and to focus on differences is our ruin. It destroys our relationships. I joke (well, sort of) when I see a St. Louis Cardinal fan or a Green Bay Packer fan that I can do an exorcism to drive out those demons. Even though our fandom is usually related to where we grew up or our family of origin. Favorite teams really shouldn’t matter. But I can remember having grown up in the Peoria-area, where it was evenly split between Cubs and Cardinal fans, having fist fights with my brother while we watched games on TV. How stupid is that? How childish? How immature?

That sin hangs with us – that original sin of hating who we are that led Adam and Eve to challenge God’s intention for them. It’s the sin that divides us so that we’re suspicious of “outsiders”. It’s the sin that infects our nation when we despise people who desire the same promise of safety and prosperity that we enjoy. It’s not new. There were the Chinese, then the Jews, and Italians (even though they sort of look the same). Germans were okay until World War I, but then... Africans were okay when they arrived in the cargo holds of ships, but not now when they flee famine or civil war. Is that God’s intention?

No. But it's so human. In the Scripture today, Paul calls out the Gentiles in Ephesus who were once called the "uncircumcision" (outsiders) as opposed to the children of Israel – called the "circumcision" (insiders). He's calling them out for a reason. Because in their acceptance of the Gospel – they have begun to presume that they are the true church – and the bias that once kept them out they now turn on others.

But this is the good news. "(God) has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself on new humanity in place of two."(Eph. 2:15) The law – the commandments – they were and are good. They help people to understand how to be godly. But having the law – being born into the covenant – or coming late there is no distinction in Jesus Christ.

That same God who spoke through Paul to the church in Ephesus – says the same to us. "I have made you one new humanity. Through my Son, Jesus Christ the one whose invitation was written not by a ball point pen and ink, but with nails and in his own blood, invites each and every soul to become a citizen of heaven. Each of us has to be naturalized. Even though it was God's intention from the beginning – in our sin – in our sin of rejecting others – each of us renounced our citizenship – we (not one of us) is any longer a native of heaven. But the port of entry to heaven and his kingdom is open to all who accept that invitation – the space isn't limited – it grows exponentially with each soul who claims that promise.

In Christ Jesus there is no distinction. Aliens may come among us. But every friend was once a stranger. When aliens come near – invite them – welcome them into your life and to the fellowship of God's kingdom so they are alien no more and together we can move beyond childish and immature attitudes that have nothing to do with God's purpose – and claim our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven with one another. AMEN