

## Christian Unity: Ephesians 2.11-end

**Thanks to Rod for today's TFTD. And yes, I too remember the Whit Walks in Crich in Derbyshire, where I grew up! Five churches and their Sunday Schools walking behind Crich Silver Prize Band to end up with a service in one of the chapels (there were two different sorts of Methodists in those days!).**



I grew up on a small housing estate in Sheffield and went to the nearest Methodist Church as a child, Stannington Methodist Church. I have some really vivid memories of that time when I would have been between 7 and 14.

One of those memories is of the annual Whit march around the village. Each church would gather behind its large banner (rather like the large trades union banners of the Durham Miners' Gala etc.) and we would meet up together to walk around the village. I remember becoming old enough to hold onto one of the ropes that held the banner stable, but never reached the dizzy heights of being old enough to carry one of the poles.

The walk took place in the morning and in the afternoon we would gather together on the sports field and have competitive games between the various churches – there was us, the Unitarians and the big church! And boy, was the competition fierce, especially in the slow bicycle race, my favourite.

My wife grew up in Leigh, near Wigan, and there they had a similar event, which they called 'Walking Day'. Did you have something similar in Alderley Edge, I wonder. Across the country this kind of thing seems to have disappeared, although I was delighted that, when I lived in Warrington a few years ago, Walking Day was

still a big thing.

After the sports day we would gather together in one of the two church halls (the Unitarians didn't have one) for tea. The memories, though, are of fierce competition between us and the big church – and they were two totally different religions in our eyes, at the time. Those of us from the chapel never went into the 'big church', it was a place of mystery and foreboding – a foreign religion!

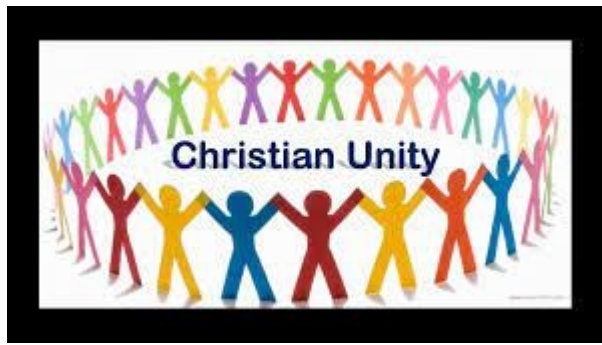


How times have changed. The ecumenical movement of the 1970s and 80s brought us closer together as ecumenical partners in the same religion; over the years we have become 'not strangers but pilgrims'. Some of us prayed for the unity scheme between the Methodist and Anglican Churches in the 1960s and were very supportive of it and some of us are not old enough even to remember that. Some of us remember the proposals for unity and we recognise that we now live in an ecumenical covenant – the Church of England and the Methodist Church have an ecumenical covenant with each other.

What has all of this to do with our reading from Ephesians? In one sense absolutely nothing at all. Paul was not writing, here or anywhere else, about Christian Churches coming together in unity. Neither was Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, in which he prayed 'that they may be one as you and I are one' a prayer for Christian unity. And yet...

“<sup>14</sup> [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility

We've come a long way from the days when we saw each other as different religions (or perhaps you never did in Alderley Edge??). So, what would it look like if we were to work together not as separate churches in the village, but as one Church? How might that enhance our witness for Christ, the image that we present of the Christian Church in the village? How would it enhance our discipleship to embrace the variety of the two different traditions? How might it help to deepen our worship if we were to enjoy an even greater variety of ministry than is currently the case in either Church?



<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Yes, I know that this is not what this passage is about. Nevertheless it stimulates my mind to think along these lines. I wonder what you think?

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