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Christ we are together
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Text: Eph. 2:13

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Now let us be quiet as before we discuss a few things in our meditation and fellowship. Let's spend a little time quietening our own heart in the presence of Him about whom we are going to not only remember, but in whose love we are going to participate.

Dear Lord Jesus we thank you especially as we see the miracle which brings us together. The miracle of your love. We pray that the blessed Holy Spirit will open out hearts that we may see how much you loved us and therefore how much we should love one another and thus become men, women for whom you died and rose again.

In Jesus name. Amen.

Let me just take the opportunity to bring your greetings from your Christian brothers and sisters in Uganda which is my homeland. And other parts of Eastern African. There are many young people like you, literally thousands and thousands of them who crowd together, high school young people, elementary school young people, university young people who are seeking and finding Jesus Christ. You see now we have come together this evening so that I may share a few things with you about the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I think before I share, you better know something about me. My parents were not Christians. So I was not brought up in a Christian home. I did not hear about Jesus or about the Bible or about the God of the Bible until I was ten. My work was to look after cows or young cows on the hills of Uganda, with other boys and girls in Africa. Carefree kind of life. That was my life. Now don't misunderstand me to think my because we were not Christians therefore we had no religion. We had religion in plenty. My father worshipped God the creator. But he believed you can only worship that great God the creator through the spirits of your dead ancestors. So it became a family kind of religion. A very human kind of religion. I don't you quarrel with that. The only problem is when you worship God through the medium of human hearts you are very likely never to go to him.

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Because human spirits act like we humans. And therefore that is how my parents worshipped. And that is how my father introduced me to this worship of the great creator who was very far away. Very far away. And we his creatures are very far down below. So my father's problem was, how do you bring that great creator from there to this creatures, very little, very limited. Some young children, some big fellows. How do you bring that God to these people? So that you create a relationship between the great creator and the creatures. They are too small he's too big. They are limited he's unlimited. How do you do that. This is a problem of all religions. I hope you Christians - see a Christian is a person who has found the way. You know before we were called Christians, what do they call us? In the Acts of the Apostles, you know the believers in Jesus were not called Christians at first. They were called Chritians later. At Antioch. They were not called Christians then. And I think if you read your Bible, your NT you will find what they call them. It is true they call them believers but they were always known as the People of the Way. The people of the Way. See. That's what we were called. We are not called Christians first. They were called Christians because they kept on singing about Jesus Christ. Speaking about Christ, so they were nicknamed, Christi-ans. It was not a name of respect. It was a name of despised, mockery. You know they talked too much about Christ, they just called them Christi-ans. But really our name was the People of what? The Way. Of the Way.

You remember Jesus said, "I am the What?" (Response) The Way. I am the Way. And therefore Chritians are people who have found the way of bringing a relationship or establishing a relationship between that great creator and this little creatures. That is why Christians were called the People of the Way. People who have found the e way.

Now you see my father did not find the way. He was religious but he never could find the way. Because the great creator remained way way there at a distance and my Dad remained down down here. And there was a big big distance between them. And therefore you couldn't say that my Dad was a person of the Way. He was seeking but he had not yet found. Until later I did find the Way at school. And I did find the way at school through other boys. We were in a boarding school.

(And young boys in a Boys' boarding school getting up at 5 in the morning to pray, on their own quietly. And they attracted me and they attracted me until I went to their little prayer meeting and there they loved me and they showed me that they had found the Way in Jesus Christ. These are the people I brought greetings from Uganda about.

Now to find the Way so that that Great Creator becomes this God, my Friend, that is the greatest miracle. And when a person finds that, whether that person is a little child or a big fellow it doesn't make any difference. You meet them anywhere whether they are sick or whether they are well. Whether they are tired or whether they are fresh they are people of the Way. And you know when you find the Way. A lot of things change. So I'm going to read to you one or two verses from the passage read in the Epistle to the Ephesians. (And then I'll talk a little bit about --- young people in Uganda and how they are finding the way. You heard those words from Paul, writing. And he said in) verse 13 in Chapter two of his letter to the Christians at Ephesus.

He says "You were far away." In other words, you were at a distance. There was a big gap between you and God. And you know when that gap began? It was when Adam and Eve as we read in the OT - created in the image of God. Created so that he maybe in fellowship with God, so that he could be a human being. He turned away from God because He wanted something to please himself.. And you know as soon as he turned away from God, and his wife turned away from God they lost the way. They lost the way. They were in darkness hiding in God's garden. When they heard God coming, and he was their friend, he created them, he was not their enemy. I don't see the reason why they should have run. They should have come with joy to meet their Father. But when He said, "Adam where are you?" Adam went and hid. Eve went and hid. They have lost the Way.

And you know this disease of hiding has invaded has invaded us human beings. Even a little child in the home. When you were young you you you know what I'm talking about. Get something, takes it from there - Mom does not give the permission and Mom calls "Hey, so and so, " -----(laughter) now where did he learn that? There is no school where you teach people to learn to do that. Where did he pick it up? Where did he pick that up? Who taught him that when you've got something in your hand and Mom calls you do that (laughter)

It is because what he did is out of the way. It is not in the way. Jesus taught us that when you do something like that you always like to hide in chapter 3 of John, he tells us about that. But what I want to tell you young people tonight, if we inherited this big funny distance between us and God and you know that distance has created many problems.

Eve and Adam took it up they lost the way. You may say, they lost their way to God. You know when you lose the way to God you lose the way to your fellowmen. You can't lose your way to God and still know your people. That's why you find people fighting among themselves. That's why you hear the story in Uganda. A Ugandan like me by name of Amin murdered half a million Ugandans in 8 years. All sort of people he killed school school boys. were shot because they were accused of being dangerous. Dangerous. Danger. He even murdered his wife because he said that wife was becoming dangerous. I want to ask you. Why should you become dangerous? Why should a human being become dangerous to another. Because we don't see. We've lost the way. And in darkness you don't see another human being properly. He becomes a dangerous person to you and therefore the only way you do is to eliminate him or her. That's why Amin was doing that.

I had just been in South Africa, lovely young people there. who would be together. Blacks, browns and white -not at all. They are kept apart. The whites on their own. The browns , the Asians on their own. The blacks on their own. And when you get in that country and you're speaking, you see groups of strangers living together. How miserable. Whoever could make sense out of that. Put one people i one country. You put those in one corner. You put others in that corner. They look at each other at a distance. No one can understand one another. How miserable. But don;t think it's only in South Africa. No. No. even here in America.

As I told you in my own country of Uganda everywhere men treat each other as strangers even in the home. Children can be strangers to their parents. Husbands can be strangers to their wives. Wives can be strangers to their husbands. We're just in that business. We're right there. And you see - many times, the funny things is that you never know when this strangeness invades you. You are laughing , you are doing things, immediately you become a stranger.

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Red eyes. You jump. You bang the door. Everything, everybody has become a stranger immediately. You don't know what has happened. You recover later with shame.

But you know what I'm trying to say to you. It is that distance which St Paul, says, at Once you were at a distance from God and therefore you became strangers to God and strangers to one another. (What is the answer?)

(We are going to remember the Holy Communion. You know in the Holy Communion or Eucharist. Bread and what we remember we Christians, what Jesus showed us before He died. He did something very simple. Very simple. He took a piece he took a loaf of bread and just broke it as int he usual way as we do it when we are eating it. And he said, "This is my body. This is my body." Then he took some wine, "This is my blood." That that - confusing words aren't they? Why chose that way. Why what do we mean by that?

You see in the bread , let me tell you. In the bread, what do you have? Once separate grains of wheat. Each sitting alone. were brought together, they were all smashed which is painful. Very painful indeed. If they were able to speak, they would protest. It's a painful exercise. to be smashed. You were nice grain, now you are broken. You can no longer find your identity. You lost it. They were all smashed through the machine, or whatever, gridding mill. And they were made into flour. And later they were made together, the flour again, made soft andthen in the end the bread. But the bread does not just come. You put in the oven. The fire. So you see the seeds lost their lives. Then they were drawn together. Then they became so completely mixed up. That no seed can come out again. Then they are ptut in the fire again a wholeness comes up. This time, it is no longer the wholeness ofr the sake of the seed. It is the wholeness, to feed the hungry. They had been made into a whole loaf of bread. Simply that the hungry be fed. You can't eat a loaf unless you break it. See. Okay then you put -----see Jesus says, "This bread, broken is my body." ONce I was whole then I became broken so that all human beings who ares standing alone in their respective places separate from one another maybe drawn together into one., That's one.

Two. Think about the wine. The grapes are separate, they are beatiful, they are on the branches. They are ~~thann~~ from there ~~then~~ they are squashed.)

(Terrible smashed. Then they suffer. Then they are squeezed, then the juice comes out. Which makes you happy when you are thirsty. But it came through the painful exercise. of the grapes being squeezed. And so Jesus said, That wine is like my love. My love went through the squeeze on the cross. Squeezed until he said, "My God! My God! why have you left me." That was a squeeze and out of that squeezed broken love there comes something so sweet that it refreshes anyone who believes. See how the way came? This is how) Jesus introduced the way. The way in which you and I now can come. to God. No more Distance. (The seeds are squeezed together and the grapes are smashed together and Jesus becomes the bridge.) And his love becomes the power which draws all sorts of people, young and old, black and white and brown together. That's why Christian faith is absolutely amazing. I can't tell you how many friends I have in the world. And I've gone around the world about four five times or ten.

One day I was in preaching in India. Great country of Hindus etc but there are many Christians there. And as I was preaching in South India, an Indian brother became so excited, the Spirit of God was working. And he was so thrilled thrilled with joy and he came and he wanted to express it. He puts his arms around me, he couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak his language. So we looked at each other rather like fools, you know. Then we developed a language. He pointed up there and then here. And I also pointed up there and here and we communicated. No words were necessary anymore. We were in each other arms I understood what he means, Jesus and he came into my heart and you are my brother and we said Jesus, and he came into my heart and you are my brother. My we began to jump about like little children. Why? Because you see that language meant there was no longer any distance between me and my Indian brother. Even even if I did not know his language. Our hearts were beating in tune Why? Because Jesus had made it.

(Let me just give you another little story which I read about in a book. During the war. This second war which fought in Europe and elsewhere, right in the heat of the fighting the Germans and the English in on the front line. As these you know shells were falling every where. A German soldier came rushing into the shell hole, you know into the hole to avoid the shell. When he jumped down ready with his gun to fight on he found there in the hole a wounded English soldier almost dying. And of course the immediate instinct of a soldier is to finish him. the enemy.)

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But before he could act according to the soldier's spirit, he looked at the man deeply woun deeply wounded. Bleeding, helpless. And immediately his mind began to change a little bit. And instead of finishing him something of the suffering of the other man began to create a kind of bridge in the other German soldier. And before he could do anything, the man who was wounded sort of beckoned to him. And he drew near and he he pointed to him said "I'm thirsty give me some water." This is the enemy and so the man opened his little canteen where they take their water, soldiers, and gave water to this man who was wounded. And then the man pointed to his pocket. To his wallet and the German soldier pulled it out and as he pulled it out some photographs fell. And there was a photograph of this man's wife and two little children. And he took him and he gave them to this dying man. The man looked at him and tears began to come in his eyes. And the German soldier realized slowly this is not just an enemy. This is a human being. He has a family. He loves. And he is loved like me.

Slowly he's changing. And you know in the end in the shell hole, a complete change took place. The German soldier put down his gun, lifted the wounded soldier on his shoulder and took him to the red cross. A different man. It is the soldier who took there who wrote the story. I read it in a book. What happened in the shell hole? What happened in the shell hole is that the distance between the German and the Englishman was bridged. What bridged it? A new relationship of humanity. A new understanding he loves. He suffers. He is in pain. He can even weep. And that discovery at a human level became a bridge.

Now with Jesus, in the Holy Communion, particularly I want to tell you that's what we remember.) Humanity today, all human beings whether it is Uganda or S.A. or Ethiopia or the U.S. or Buffalo or here in your beautiful city, all human beng are suffering because we are standing at a distance. And in the distance we don't see each other. All we can see is a black figure, a white figure. A brown figure. A poor man. A rich man. Even in religion, even in religion in Christian religion people don't see each other. They see their particular religion. And so you see we need to change and see.

Stellenbosch

(Young people particularly,) I was speaking to students in S.A. in a white university. We went there to preach. And I told' them and I said, students you yong people in S.A. Africa can change your country without destroying it. They didn't understand at first. But later they understood what I was getting at. You see, it's always young people who are not victims of their prejudices. who can see where we old people don't see. And particularly if you receive Jesus' eyes. So inthe in i this few words, you were once at a distance but now you have been brought near through the blood, which means through the love Christ. Because the blood of Christ means love sacrificing itself. That's what the blood is all about. And Jesus love sacrificed hmself. So that we from Uganda , you from the States, the blacks, the white. You know what I tell people as making the S.A. laugh. I siad, you've been fighting over color, you whites fearthe blacks because of the blackness of the color. You blacks hate the whites because the whites don't like your color. I said, who told youj that colors were made to be fought over? I haven't seen you fight over your cardigans and your black and brown suits, and white shirt. Why don't you fight over those? You accept those and even the flowers in your garden. But you can't accept them when you see a human being with a beautiful black or a beautiful brown, a beautiful white. I said, may I tell you my philosophy of why we are different? in color. They said, they laughed and said, what do you say Bishop?

I said, God does not like monotony. (laughter) so beause he doesn't like monotony He doens't like only white faces because it will make you tired. So he puts in blacks. When you are tired of the white, you look at the black and get a holiday. And when you are looking at the black faces only you get better a bit monotonous so you change and youve' got a white, you've got a break. So they laugh and we laughed together. I said, but we human beings are funny. The good things which God gives us becomes means by which we fight each other. By which we hate one another. As if it was a mistake. It was not a mistake.

So as I conclude this, let us come together. (And when we draw near, remember it is not just an experiece of odrawing near in a tradition of religion. It is real drawing near.

One day when Christ began to operate on my poor little heart. Many years back. I was hating a white missionary. I don't know he was English and reserve. And you know and we were under the British. I just hated this white man. And I)

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(was working under him in the school system. I was a school teacher. I didn't like this man so much that whenever he came to supervise the school and came to my class I walked out. Very very proud. Then let me just tell you what happened. Then the Lord Jesus began to do his beautiful work. Operating on my little heart. Opening its eyes. And you know what happened? About one week later, He reminded me that I had hated my brother. I said, which brother? He said, the white missionary. What do you mean Lord? You mean that man is my brother? English language, white color and everything. Yes, he's your brother. If you belong to me and he belongs to me and I love you both, you are brothers. So what Lord? So what? You go to him. (laughter) Go to him. To do what? To ask him to forgive you. Your wrong attitude which has made him miserable.

So I took my bicycle. I didn't have a car. And I cycled 50 miles to go to this man. through the mountains of Western Uganda. And I went and I got to his house in the afternoon. And you know when I came near the house, I began to wish he were not at home (laughter) because I was a little bit apprehensive. However, I looked at the door reluctantly and he was at home and he opened the door.

And let me tell you what I saw. The man I had hated. The man I had resented, when I looked at him he was not the same. He was a different man. And so he looked wonderful. I thought he looked, you know lovable. You know what had changed? Not his features. But this fellow has changed. I no longer looked at him in the same glasses. My glasses had changed.

So I walked into the house and I didn't even ask him or tell him I was excited and the Spirit was working and I put my arms round him. It nearly killed him being Englishman (laughter) Because you see English people don't embrace. So I jumped and I embraced him, a reserved graduate of Oxford University. He really froze in my arms (laughter) then I told him and I said, now I've come here to tell you, you are my brother. I am sorry I must have made your life a misery by resenting and hating you. Please forgive me.)

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The Lord Jesus has removed those horrible mountains of hatred. Now you are my brother. We both were --- we sat and talked then we prayed. Then I took my bicycle and I cycled back and I thought my bicycle had an engine. I was free. The heart was free and the journey was light for the distance was removed.

So when you come to the Holy Communion, when you receive the bread and you receive the cup remember what is it that it's saying to you? It's saying to you "I bridged the gap, I removed the distance. I love you, therefore love one another." Then you can heal America. Then you can heal Uganda. Then you can heal one another.

I think I'm going to stop there young people. Thank you for listening and I hope that this little message "No more distances but in the love of Christ we are together." And that is what makes life worth living. // *Abraham*

Let us pray. (Applause)

This moment just before we do the rest of the service, you do something. I want you to hold each other's hand. A commitment to one another. It's no good talking about Jesus and the bridging of the distances if we are going to remain apart. And together as a community whom Jesus loves, I'm going to ask that we be silent. Of course thanking him. Do you ever know -- if you have never known him personally as the only bridge and the only lover who can really make welcome. I want to ask you as we are silent, you can say "Lord Jesus, tonight I commit this life to you. I want you to be my friend, my Lord and my Saviour."

And I want to encourage you that can never be regretted. So let us be silent. In the heart -- in the depth of your heart make that commitment to the Lord. Even if you mean to renew it, renew it because it is renewable. If you are not sure make sure. He loves you. He loves your brother, your sister, your friend. He even loves people whom you don't like.

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(Silence)

I'm going to say a short prayer.

Lord Jesus we commit ourselves afresh to you.

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Lord take away the distances that make us strangers
to one another. Forgive the sins which build walls
and separate us from one another, and blind us.
Give us new eyes of love. Give us new hearts of love.
That we may heal one another and heal your world.
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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