

A Church for All Peoples
Psalm 67; Ephesians 2:11–22; Matthew 28:16–20

Rev Dr Deo Vistar
St Augustine's Anglican Church
Unley, South Australia

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It is a privilege to share God's Word with you this morning.

Last Sunday, I had the opportunity to cast a vision for the development of small-groups ministry at St Augustine's. As I shared, we want to see Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered, biblically grounded and prayerful small groups become a vital part of our life together as a church. This is also one of the priorities identified in our Mission Action Plan 2026–2030. Our vision is not simply that we gather for worship on Sunday mornings, but that we also gather during the week to pray together, study God's Word, encourage one another, share life together and serve together. I shared some of the blessings that can come through such a ministry: deeper Christian community, spiritual growth, new people encountering Christ and becoming part of the church, the development of new leaders and servants, and the joy of seeing God at work among us.

I was therefore very encouraged by the response last Sunday. Many of you expressed interest in participating in a small group, while others are interested in leading or helping us develop this ministry. I am very grateful for that response, and I believe it is an encouraging indication of a desire among us to grow together as disciples of Christ.

At the same time, I recognise that not everyone will be able to participate in a small group at this stage of life. Some of you already have significant commitments within the church or in the wider community, and I completely understand that.

But I do want to reaffirm that small groups are not simply another programme we are adding to the church calendar. Small groups express something fundamental about what the church is. The New Testament knows nothing of a Christian life lived entirely on our own. We belong to one another in Christ, and we are called to love, encourage, pray for and build one another up.

So thank you to everyone who has already responded. And if you are still considering whether God might be calling you to participate or serve in this ministry, there are Response Forms available at the back of the church.

This morning I want to speak on the theme "A Church for All Peoples." Here in the city of Adelaide, I am sure there are many churches that could be described as multiethnic, multicultural and international. They are churches where people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds worship and share life together as one church community. You may find Brazilians, Chinese, Indians, Italians, South Africans and people from many other parts of the world worshipping together as brothers and sisters in Christ. And there is something remarkable

about that: people who come from very different backgrounds can belong to one church and share one life together in Christ.

St Augustine's is one of those multiethnic, multicultural and international churches. I wonder if you have thought about that, and I wonder whether, when you think about our church, you see us in that way. I hope you do, because that is who we are. And I want to suggest that this is not simply an interesting characteristic of our church; it is something we can celebrate as a good, beautiful, godly and biblical expression of the church of Jesus Christ.

God's purpose has always been for all peoples

From the very beginning, and throughout the Scriptures, we see that God's purposes have never been confined to one race, one nation, one language or one culture. God is gathering people from every nation, every tribe, every people and every language into one people under the lordship of Jesus Christ. And therefore, when people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds come together in one church, we are seeing something of God's own purposes for his church being expressed among us.

In our reading from Psalm 67, the psalm begins with a prayer: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us." At first, that sounds like a prayer simply for God's own people. But then we hear why the psalmist wants God to bless his people: "so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." In other words, God blesses his people so that his salvation may be known among all peoples.

And the psalm repeats this theme: "May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you." And again: "May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him."

So, from the very beginning, God's saving purposes have extended beyond one people. When God chose Israel in the Old Testament, he did not choose Israel because he had abandoned or rejected the other peoples of the world. Israel was chosen to be the people through whom God's blessing would ultimately reach the nations.

And then we come to our Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28, Christ says to his disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." There is something important for us to understand about that word "nations." The Greek word Matthew uses is *ethnē*, the plural of *ethnos*. It is the word from which we get our English word "ethnic." It can refer to peoples or groups of people, and we should not simply equate it with the modern idea of a sovereign nation-state.

When we hear the word "nations" today, we naturally think of countries such as Australia, China, India, Brazil or the United States, each with its own borders and government. But Jesus is not giving his disciples a modern geopolitical map and telling them to go from one country to another. He is sending them to the *peoples* of the world. And this is important because a particular country can contain many different peoples, cultures and languages.

Take China, for example. We might casually speak of "the Chinese people" as though China were one homogeneous ethnic and linguistic community. But China itself officially recognises 56

ethnic groups, including the Han, Zhuang, Hui, Tibetan, Uyghur, Miao, Yi, Mongolian, Korean, Dai and many others. There are also many different languages and dialects within China. So when we say “China,” we are referring to a modern political state. But within that state are many different peoples.

The same is true of Brazil. Brazil is one modern nation-state, but within its borders are many Indigenous peoples and languages. The 2022 Brazilian census identified 391 Indigenous ethnicities, peoples or groups and 295 Indigenous languages. Among them are peoples such as the Tikuna, Kokama, Makuxi, Guaraní Kaiowá, Guajajara and Kaingang.

So when Jesus says, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” we should hear something much bigger than “go to every country.” He is saying, in effect: Go to the peoples. Cross the boundaries that separate peoples. Cross ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Go beyond the boundaries of your own people. And make disciples of them.

Christ has created one new humanity

Now, when we turn to our reading from Ephesians 2, we find something even more remarkable. Paul is not simply talking about Christians from different ethnic backgrounds being friendly towards one another. He is talking about something much deeper. He says to the Gentile Christians: “Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ ... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

And then comes one of the great statements of the New Testament: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.”

Think about how extraordinary that is. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ does not merely bring people from different backgrounds into the same room or even into the same church. Christ creates “one new humanity” out of people who were once separated from one another.

Paul continues: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household...” And he concludes: “In him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

This is therefore the beautiful reality of the church: people from many peoples and cultures are brought together into one household, one people and one dwelling place of God. The gospel does not require us to erase our ethnic identities. Nor does it allow those differences to become barriers that divide us. Instead, Christ brings us together in our diversity and makes us one in him. We may come from different peoples, speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds, but we have one Lord, one Saviour and one Spirit – and therefore we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

What does this mean for St Augustine's?

So, what does all of this mean for us as a local church? I believe it has several important implications.

First, we should embrace our multiethnic identity as a gift from God. St Augustine's is one of the parishes in our diocese that is recognised as a multicultural parish. A few months ago, I had the pleasure of attending the first gathering of leaders from these parishes, hosted by Archbishop Brad and his wife, Karen, in their home. Nine parishes were represented at that gathering: four Sudanese congregations, one Iranian congregation, one Tamil congregation, two Indian congregations, and one multicultural congregation. We are the only one among these nine parishes with a Mandarin ministry. I will be attending a follow-up meeting in early October, where we will begin planning a joint multicultural worship service at St Peter's Cathedral later this year.

But while St Augustine's is recognised as a multicultural parish because of our well-established and growing Mandarin ministry, we are not merely a bicultural or bi-ethnic church; we are genuinely a multiethnic church. Our English congregation is itself multiethnic. Yes, the majority are white Australians, but we also have people from different ethnic backgrounds among us, and we are seeing this diversity grow.

And, interestingly, even our Mandarin congregation is not entirely made up of Mandarin speakers. There are people who do not speak Mandarin but who love worshipping with the Mandarin congregation. Thanks to the English translation regularly provided; they are able to participate in the service. So even our Mandarin congregation is, in fact, multiethnic.

Our vision, therefore, is for our English ministry to continue growing as an English-speaking congregation where people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds are warmly welcomed and genuinely able to belong. And our vision for the Mandarin ministry is to continue growing as a Mandarin and bilingual ministry that is also open to welcoming people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds who desire to be part of it.

The goal is not simply for people from different cultures to attend our church. The goal is that they might belong, that they might find a spiritual home, grow in Christ, serve Christ, form friendships, worship alongside brothers and sisters who are different from them, and together participate in God's mission.

A Vision for St Augustine's

So, as we look ahead, this is part of the vision we have for St Augustine's: a church where people from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds worship Jesus together. We see our English ministry continuing to grow as a welcoming and outward-looking English-speaking congregation, and our Mandarin ministry continuing to grow as a Mandarin and bilingual ministry that welcomes people from different backgrounds. We see opportunities for our congregations to share fellowship and ministry together, and we see us learning to appreciate one another's cultures rather than being suspicious or fearful of difference. So let us pray that God will increasingly make our church what he has called us to be: a church for all peoples.

And I want to conclude with the remarkable vision given to the apostle John of the church in the fullness of God's kingdom, when Christ has returned and brought the salvation of his people to completion. John writes: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (*Revelation 7:9–10*)

That is the church as God intends it to be: people from every nation, tribe, people and language, united in worship before Jesus Christ. May God graciously help St Augustine's to reflect something of that glorious vision here and now.

Amen.