

"In Christ There Is No East or West" is one of my favorite hymns, partially because I enjoyed playing the song on my flute with the church choir back when I was in high school, but also because of its unifying message. In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth. The melody is bouncy and joyful, which makes this a fun hymn to sing, but it also embodies the vision of a unified kingdom of heaven where all are welcome and all are loved. In Romans 10:12, Paul states that there is no distinction between Jew or Greek, a sentiment that is expanded in Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. We live in a world that lives by labels. When everything and everyone has a label, we can easily categorize and separate the things and people we like from the things and people we don't like. Some labels can be a source of pride, others can harbor painful memories and shame, but all labels serve in some form or another as a means to distinguish some groups from others. I could go on about how labels are placed intentionally to divide and oppress people, but listen to what Paul is saying: "There is no distinction between Jew or Greek." There is no good or bad, clean or unclean, immigrant or citizen, gay or straight. There is only one great fellowship of God's children, each one being grafted onto the root of love that supports and sustains us.