

Ephesians 2:11-22

Smashing Dividing Walls

I happen to enjoy home renovation shows. If you watch *Property Brothers*, they often begin the renovation of a home with the new home owners getting in there with sledge hammers to take out dividing walls so that there is a new open concept. They are always encouraged to go for it with all their strength and energy. If they are not swinging the hammer hard enough not much happens, but when they get into it, drywall gets crushed and goes flying, studs are cut out, and whatever was in the way of the new design is dealt and usually pretty drastically. Whenever they do come across something that gets in the way of the desired result, they find a new plan that accommodates the desire to get the wall out of the way.

It is this image that comes to mind when I read the words in Ephesians that Jesus in his flesh has broken down the dividing wall, that is hostility between people. The people in conflict that this letter was addressing were the Jewish Christians who had all the backing of history on their side or what is call Torah and the new Gentile Christians who, it would seem, had been without God. This conflict was antagonistic with a strong dividing line of "us verse them."

We have many such examples in our own time around the globe. In Canada at this moment there is a divide between Indigenous and settlers with the Residential School revelations of late creating even more challenges. World wide there is racism where lines are drawn between those who are black and those who are white and the privileged that white skin affords a person.

Blazing wild fires and flash floods along with other extreme weather patterns are pitting those who listen to the science of climate change against the oil industry and those who see no problem with fossil fuels. In this time of pandemic, we have antivaxxers and those who would have mandatory vaccinations, as well as anti maskers and those who choose to wear masks. And though Canada seems to be managing the pandemic pretty well right now, one need only look south of the border or to Japan where the Olympics are at this moment carrying on, or to India, or other less developed countries, to know that the pandemic and the controversies that go with it are still ongoing.

As for walls, we all know about the wall that Trump was building between Mexico and the U.S. Biden has put a stop to the building but there is no decision as to what will happen with the wall that is in place or to the landscape that has already been damage in preparation for a wall to be built. Then there is the wall that Israel has been constructing to basically annex part of Palestine for Israeli occupation.

Just last Monday at our own City Council's meeting a motion was presented to direct city administration to install locking gates on the pedestrian overpass to restrict overnight access. The motion was defeated for the obvious reasons. The gates would not be a very welcoming sight, and did not address the unlaying issues that brought about the motion in the first place. And if we want to bring it really close to home, I was reminded this week that this church, our St. Andrew's, erected gates at our sanctuary doors that also create a barrier. The intention was one of safety for those on the streets and for the congregation, but to those who are not aware, it appears that we created a wall of defense against those who are homeless and were using the area for sleeping.

Theologian Karen Chakoian writes about these things saying,

One could argue that the laws and the commandments were themselves peacekeeping fences. Human beings need boundaries both for self-protection and to prevent interference with their neighbor's life. "Do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery" all define boundaries. This is yours, and not that. To love one's neighbor is to honour their boundaries...[However] Eliminating boundaries does not in itself create peace. Peace comes only by eliminating the hostility behind the dividing walls. God does not merely tear down walls, but unites people in the One who is our peace, creating one new humanity.¹

We have seen walls come down in our time. Many will remember the day the Belin Wall came down. Who would have expected to see that in their lifetime? Then came the end of apartheid in South Africa. Both these events brought hope that maybe the world could change. Maybe we were on the verge of something big. Maybe we truly could stop the hate and hostility of one group against another. Yet in the ensuing years we have seen more protectionism, more hate, more individualism that only responds to what is best for me not my neighbour. As was noted division seem as deep or deeper than ever.

And yet, centuries ago, there too was hostility with dividing lines that seemed impossible to breach. Into this, Jesus came and with his flesh he made both groups into one and broke down the dividing wall. That dividing wall was and is not a physical one. Physical walls are built in reaction to a dividing wall of hostility between people. Jesus takes a sledge hammer and smashes the walls with his death that was born out of God's passionate love for the people created in God's own image.

Many think of God's image as a white man, but trust me on this, everyone who walks the face of the earth is made in the image of God. Black, brown, white, indigenous, lesbian, gay, bi, trans, two spirited, male or female, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, homeless and downtrodden or rich and famous, able bodied or who face physical, social, or mental challenges, sick or healthy all are made in God's own image. There is no label

¹ Chakoian, Karen.. *Feasting on the Word: Year B Volume 3 Pentecost and Season after Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P258.

that we humans can put on a person that takes away from the fact that each person is awesomely and wonderfully made by God.

In Jesus we are one! All of us brought near to God and one another by the blood of Christ for he is our peace! Christ created one new humanity...thus making peace, putting to death on the cross the hostility that divides one from another, granting everyone access to God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is no such thing as a stranger or alien in the land as we all have a place in the household of God, built on a foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the key stone from which all else will find its place. But this is not a building that is built and then stops, the analogy has limitations because this structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple. We are that structure, we become the holy temple, our bodies, our minds, and not just one, but everyone. We are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for Godself.

If this is the case, we must have hope that we can change our world. That we can see the humanity in each face we greet, even in each person we do not have the privilege of meeting and yet we know exists, from the refugee, to the immigrant, to the people who walked the lands before us. In all that seems too diverse to imagine a place of unity, we get to work toward that unity.

How to we do it? We start with love. We love as God first loved us. We take time to listen and learn rather than judging and instructing. We look behind the words to learn why. Then we roll up our sleeves and get to work joining the structures, growing the family of God through love and compassion recognizing there are many expressions of God born out of the experiences of lives lived.

Christ came to proclaim peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near. At the time of the letter, it meant Gentiles were far off and Jews were near, but in our time, it is about those who know that they are beloved children of God and those who don't know. Even those who think there are near are sometime way off. I don't think I have repeated these words from John 3:16 as often in my life as I have in the last year, but it bears repeating, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believe in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that Jesus came and smashed dividing walls to let you know that you are loved. All of you and everyone you meet is loved. If God loves us this much what better way to respond than to also break down any barriers that come between you and another, between nations, cultures, people. We get to do that! This is our calling. No matter where you live, what you do, your age, or anything else that you could use as a reason to leave it up to someone else. We get to be the ones who work in the power of the Holy Spirit to break down the dividing walls and create that open concept household of God in our time, and in our places.

Do not lose hope, but be hope. United as one people already members of the household of God, go be the reconciling love, be compassion, be children of God who have the peace of Christ. And may we recognize the work we are all doing as we are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God. Amen.