

"A House Without Walls"

Texts: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a

Ephesians 2:11-22 (Series B. 7th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 89:20-37

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Let us Pray - Bless, O God, the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts that they may be acceptable to thee, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There is a story that comes out of Poland from many years back - it was during the Second World War in fact, at a time Poland was, by and large a Roman Catholic nation. It happened that in a particular village there was a man who was well known for his care and compassion for others and was deeply loved because of it. He was not a rich man, nor was he a native of the village, nor did he attend the village church.

In fact, he was not even baptised. Before and during the War he was known for his good works within the village that he had adopted as his place to live and work. If a stranger came to the village and needed a place to stay, this man would offer a bed in his little home.

If a village family ran out of food, he was among the first to offer a loaf of bread or some flour from his meagre supplies. When the Germans or, later the Russians, were performing a sweep of the village to collect up the young men for either to force them into the army, or worse, he would help hide the would be victims in the woods outside town or in some other way.

He was loved very much by the villagers on account of all these things and many more. Finally, the man died from some illness. The villagers prepared his body for burial and proceeded to the village church where they asked the local Priest to perform the burial service and to bury the man in the church cemetery.

The priest, who knew and loved the man as much as did the rest of the villagers agreed that he would conduct the funeral service - but he insisted, that he could not bury the man inside the church cemetery because he was not baptised.

"I cannot bury him in our cemetery", the priest said, "It is holy ground. He must go where those who are not baptised are buried. Those are the rules of the church and I cannot change them."

The villagers appealed even more earnestly to the priest, saying that the man was a good man and surely loved by God as much as any of the baptised, perhaps even more on account of all the good that he had done.

The priest agreed with them regarding the virtues of the man, but insisted that the rules of the faith were clear and could not be broken. Finally came up with a compromise that he hoped would please everyone.

"In recognition of your love for him - and his love for you and all of God's people in this village", he said, "I will bury him on church land, near to those who have gone before him - those whom he has loved, but it will have to be beyond the fence that surrounds the consecrated ground of our cemetery."

And so it was. On the appointed day a grave was prepared just outside the fence that surrounded the church cemetery, and the body of the man was processed by all the villagers to the site where the priest conducted the ceremony - and then the grave was filled in and a stone placed before the night fell.

During the night something very beautiful happened - something that became apparent when the priest went to the church next morning to conduct morning mass. The fence that surrounded the cemetery had been moved by some of the villagers - so that it now included the grave in which the man had been buried....

The story impressed me, for me it captures something of what Jesus was all about - something of what the good news is all about - namely inclusivity. As the villagers expanded the fence to include the grave of the man whom they loved - so God, through Christ Jesus, expands the boundaries of the sacred to include both those whom the rules of our religion would exclude - and those that the ways of this world would exclude. That's good news for us this morning because we live in a world of walls. Dividing walls are everywhere we look. Consider our every day language.

How often we call others *"those people"*, or use the term *"they"*, and *"their kind"* in our conversations. We say, "Those people come over to our country and expect...." or, "Their kind always have their hand out" and so forth.

"They" most often are the strangers in our midst, people from another country, with accents, a different shade of skin, different customs of religion and food, and different ways of being family. But often too they don't come from another land, but live in a different part of town and attend other churches - or no church at all.

Whoever *"they"* are, they are different than us. Perhaps they are on welfare. Perhaps they are conservatives or liberals or Catholics, or fundamentalists. Maybe they are environmentalists.

Perhaps they are folks who are body pierces or tattoos all over their body, or LGBTQ. The walls that we erect take many forms. Some related to our culture and to our way of life and of earning a living. Some related to what we believe to be true about God or about Jesus.

It seems that we persist in building walls to keep away those who don't share our understanding - our way of doing things. That's one reason we have so many denominations. One reason why I believe that Christ cried out when he looked upon Jerusalem, saying:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

We are all in need of the reconciliation spoken of by Paul in today's epistle. We are all in need of a fresh look at just who we are in the eyes of God - and where we fit in the family of God.

The second lesson this morning contains the heart, the key message in the entire letter to the Ephesians. It comes from a section of the epistle that speaks of the benefits offered to both Gentiles and Jews (*"the we"*) through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

The writer seems to be aware of a prophecy from Isaiah (57:18-19). The prophet says that God notices that his faithless people are suffering from their infidelities, that they are exhausted from their rebelliousness against him. God saw their ways (*Is. 57:18*) and withdrew from them, but now has mercy on them.

"Peace, peace to the far off and the near." the Prophet proclaims. God, through the prophet, was addressing the Jews in exile (the "far off"), but Paul the apostle applies the same imagery to Gentiles who have accepted the Gospel message.

Just as blood sacrifice reconciled the Jewish community in covenant to God, so the blood of Christ has reconciled us to each other and to God - making of us one spiritual family wherein God may dwell. All are called in Christ Jesus to be one - both Jews and Gentiles – for through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

The barriers of hostility, the walls of division, are broken down. God has seen our human condition and come to our help in Christ, whom God has made "one new humanity family". A new creation has occurred, a new people of God has been made from people who formerly were enemies.

What saves us then, it is not keeping all the rules of the church and doing the right things. What saves us, Paul reminds us, is that we all have access to God because we have faith and believe in Christ.

Race, gender, culture, biblical knowledge, conservatism or liberalism, and heritage have no part in our salvation - for all are chosen by God and all are loved by him. God longs to gather all people together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings - and in Christ God has acted to do so.

How far are those whom we label as different from us? Not far at all, the epistle reminds us, for in Christ the walls that divide us are broken down. So, how goes our living response to the unity God has achieved for us? We need to look again at those we call "strangers". We need to see them not as different from us, but as essentially the same.

Paul invites us to look at ourselves and others in a different light, a light created by God. We need to look at the barriers we have set up, or that are part of the local and larger world in which we live.

Barriers are not to exist between us right! We are called to consider how we all contribute to those barriers, how we add bricks and mortar to their construction and to ask God to help us remove them and to build a new house in our world, one without walls.

When people are shunted because they are different, we need to offer them hospitality, some space of welcome in which they can be themselves. Hospitality means people don't have to conform to our ways, but that they can be themselves in our presence. It doesn't try to change people but enables them freedom and space to change at their own pace in their own way - as God leads them individually and collectively - just as God has done for us.

We now have a house built by eternal Son of God - the one whose kingdom is truly everlasting, the one whom God calls over and over again, "my beloved son". Listen again to what Paul says of this chosen one of God - and of the house- the temple - the church that he would build.

"He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you and I are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you and I are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." A House without Walls.

Both gentiles and Jews are all called to be part of the house that God builds - and are all made part of that house by the Spirit of God. A house without walls in a kingdom without end. So come Lord Jesus.

In a moment we are going to be invited to partake in the Lord's supper. An invitation to the good, the bad and the ugly all are welcome. Let God do the judging. Let the Spirit of God do the convicting. Let us do the loving and so proclaim God's glory, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Wess Bourgaize, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen, & Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers.*

God of Compassion and Hope, urge us on as one new humanity in place of many, that we may break down walls of division, and be reconciled to You in the peace of Christ, as one body through the Cross. We ask through Jesus, the Cornerstone who joins us together; and the Holy Spirit, our Access to the Divine; who together with You are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Crown Him with Many Crowns # 855**
- **I Am the Bread of Life # 485**
- **Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory # 890**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Sanaz Karimian

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