

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall”
Ruth 1:11-18; Ephesians 2:11-22;
Matthew 28:16-20

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Let me set the scene. There is a rock wall through the forest between two neighbors. In the springtime they seem to have a ritual where they come along and walk the wall to mend it. As this is happening, one of the people walking along the wall begins to wonder, “Why are we mending this wall again?” They come to the point where there are pines on one side and apple trees on the other, and he says to his neighbor, “I don’t think my apple trees are going to come eat your pine cones. Why do we need a wall? If we’re going to have a wall, shouldn’t we figure out why we need one?”

Let me pick up the poem at that point. It’s a Robert Frost poem:

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down. I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."*

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall. It feels to me like that is what is being talked about in Ephesians, as well. Whatever it is that forms the wall, whether it is the wall in the woods or the wall that gets between us, there is some reason for that wall to come down. Today, it seems like we think about the kinds of walls we make, the very boundaries of nations. Oftentimes, there’s no geographic reason for some of those boundaries. They are simply something we’ve decided on; a way of dividing ourselves.

Today, with travel, we seem to be breaking down those walls in some ways. We get to go to a variety of places and meet different people. In fact, just take a minute and think: where is someplace that you’ve gone that was unexpected for you in some way, or that made you think how people live differently. Think about a place like that, and then I’m going to ask you to think of a person in that place. So think of a place that has a person in it, a person who helped you recognize that they are a person just like us, with the same kinds of concerns and desires. They want to care for their families and they need food and all these kinds of things. You could feel the barrier wasn’t really there. Can you think of a place and a person?

Think about how in your travels what used to be a barrier, a wall, has been broken down. You have seen beyond. Sometimes the barrier is simply my own mind and what I think. I recognize I can go someplace else and what's normal here is not quite normal there. And yet, there's something wonderful about that experience. It goes beyond.

Jesus is talking about breaking down the walls that divide us in who he is. Sometimes I think that one of the ways we struggle with this is that I get a little afraid of going somewhere else or meeting someone new or trying to figure out what is going on further out. I can begin to create the desire to just stay in my community, but then maybe there are struggles there as well. Maybe it would be better if I just stay within my little group, or maybe if I just stay with myself. We can isolate and try to reduce that fear, and yet that also can be what feels to me like crazy-making. It can cause a struggle. There's a fear that may influence us and lead us to want to try to isolate because we don't understand.

There's another piece that could be part of that. I was talking with Helen a while back. She was talking about how when she was growing up she was in 4-H. In everything they did, they were judged. There was always a first, second, and third. There was always judgment going on. Now I don't think there's anything wrong with celebrating the good that somebody does, but when we always create a winner and a loser—does anybody here want to be the loser? We struggle with that dichotomy and we too easily make it happen all the time. There's always a winner and a loser, and that, I think, can be one of those things that begins to create some fear in us. Do I want to go into a place that's going to judge me? Am I a winner or a loser?

And how do we decide who's the winner and who's the loser? One way we do that is to look to others to see if we're like them. Do I want this or that? Who's better? Can I be all white, or all black, or do I need to be spotted? We continually look and judge and try to figure out where we fit. As we do that, we begin to create divisions among us. We want ours. It feels to me that this turns into a huge tug-of-war. Somebody says, "I want mine." Then somebody else says, "No, I want mine." We can't figure out how we each can deal with that because we're taught, I think, that we're supposed to play the game of tug-of-war. What happens if we don't?

It feels to me like Jesus is saying to us that we don't have to. He says, "You don't have to be two 'others' to each other. You don't have to be in competition all the time. I came so that those who were alien are no longer alien, that the hostility between you is no longer there." When Jesus tells his disciples to go out, he doesn't say, "I want you to go to this one group because they're the only ones that get to go to heaven." He says, "Go to all nations." In Ephesians, it says God is not partial.

So when he invited his disciples to gather around the table, it's a twofold thing. First, it's about the grace of God. We remember that Jesus gave his life for us, that God's love came into our world through him. And second, he is embracing us as a family of faith, embracing us as all God's children invited to come to the table and to know the grace of God. He's inviting us to let go of the tug-of-war.

I think this is incredibly hard. I don't know about you, but I think I grew up with a sense of trying to figure out who I am. Should I be white, should I be black, should I be speckled? It is not always quite that clear. When we walk into a room of people, what is our first response? Is there something in my teeth? Or is it, here's a group of people I get to meet and know and learn from? How easy it is to have some sense of a dance of who gets to be the good one, the top dog, the speckled dog.

Jesus is inviting us to do something that in some ways feels counter to a natural proclivity. He takes away the barrier, the concern about who is better and who is worse. He invites us to recognize each person as a child of God. We have the opportunity to share this space and get to know one another and learn the wonder of who each person is. To share our lives. To share a table.

He invites us all. We may not do it the same. Some people may use different food. Some people may come forward. Some people may sit in their pews. Some people may stand in a circle. But it is a meal that is shared around the world. World Communion Sunday is something that Presbyterians recognized in 1936 so that we could begin to think about how we are not a divided world, but how we are all children of God, invited to the same table—a family of faith.

We are thinking about the kingdom of God. There's something about the kingdom of God that says we are all part of that family, of that kingdom, and we get to share the food. We get to share the grace. We get to share in each other's lives.

So as we come today, it is a time to remember that not only are we given the grace here, but we are part of this larger family, part of people who are doing this around town, across the country, and across the world. In Christ, we are one family. We all are invited into one kingdom—the kingdom of God. Amen.