

Pastor T.C. Arnold
17th Sunday after Trinity
Ephesians 4:1-6
October 12th, 2014

The late-great American poet Robert Frost once wrote, **“Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun, And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.”**

Now, I know little about poetry. I understand poetry even less (and I had a hard time understanding this poem as well). But others have said that this poem (of which I just read a small portion) is about how we create ways to separate ourselves from others. Frost points out that we create stronger relationships by distancing ourselves – not wanting to get too close and by virtue of doing so, hurting our relationships in the process. Perhaps that is why he also says in the poem, **“Good fences make good neighbors.”** To an extent we can all relate.

Yet at the same time we hate walls. Walls divide and separate as well as confine and stifle. They are meant to shut in some and then shut out others. The Berlin wall, for example, was erected to separate the east from the west – the communist world from the free world. The iron curtain was a symbol of how economic and political and social difference can disunite a people and disrupt the life of nations. More on the Berlin wall later.

There are other walls, like “the other side of the tracks,” the social and racial barriers that separate the city from the suburbs, the walls of hatred, prejudice, and bigotry that suffocate the life of a community. There are denominational lines that separate Christians from each other. Yes, **“Something there is that does not love a wall.”**

And yet, there is also something that does love a wall. There are people who are secure only because there are walls. They need to keep out those who are different, who threaten to disturb their status quo. Their purpose in life is not to know and share unity and community with others; they want rather uniformity, standardization, sameness – to the point there will be no unity. Beloved, we must be on guard about creating too many walls – especially with people who might not be familiar with our church or schools. Maybe they don't look like us or talk like us and our walls go up – not just with church but with befriending someone we have already judged before getting to know them. We love walls and we often put them up. We feel safe behind walls.

Paul was behind a wall when he wrote these words – a prison wall – because he dared to go out and break down walls. No, not actual walls – but rather social walls and religious walls. He got under the skin of the Jewish leaders, told them that their laws were an affront to people, that their theology was contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew what divided the people. He knew what to proclaim for the sake of breaking down walls. So, he writes to the Church in Ephesus and proclaims to them the unity they have with God and with each other. He assures them that they have a Word that breaks down all walls, that they have a Gospel to share freely and openly, that *“there is but one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all who is in all and through all.”* Seven times Paul says that there is a “one” and only. His message is about unity.

It is true – the perfect state is to be at one with God, at one with yourself, at one with others. Oneness is important. So, what makes us “dis-unified?” It's sin, of course. Think about that for just a moment. There is no longer perfect balance in nature, no longer perfect harmony among people and races and nations, no longer a perfect oneness between God and man. The conditions are now in disharmony, disorder and disunity. Instead of being together, things are pulled apart – even an inner brokenness that pervades everything and everyone. When a person hates God – despises His will – hates himself – hates anyone at all – he isn't one anymore. He's split and disunited. Maybe the best “plain as day” example of this is marriage and divorce. There is no one of us who hasn't been affected in some way by divorce. This affects us severely because when God puts things together – in this case

a man and a woman – they are not to be torn apart. As a matter of fact, there is no instance in the Bible where God tears this “oneness” apart. There are specific cases where divorce is “allowed” in the Scriptures, such as abandonment and affairs, but God never “mandates” divorce. And for this reason it says in the Bible, “*What God has joined together (made one), let not man separate.*” This is just one example. Oneness being divided by sin can be seen by any of us who see or are in the midst of disputes, wars, factions, and the like.

But how do we put it all together again? That’s the question for you and me today. Do we do this through keeping the law of God better? Well, we need the law, there is no doubt about that. Without rules for our community, our workplaces, our homes and our lives, there would be bedlam. For the sake of common welfare there are many ways in which we have to conform to the rules.

But the law does not make us “one.” The law does not give us “unity.” It may make us “uniform” but it doesn’t make us “united.” The law, for the sake of “oneness” with God will not make us any closer to Him. In the same vain, the existence of rules and standards in your home may bring about some order, but if that’s all that holds your family together you have something less than unity. The reason, we can be bound by rules, but in rules, there is no power of healing.

There is healing for our soul that can be found only in one place. And that, beloved in the Lord, is where we want to be absolutely unified. There are no walls dividing us here. The Gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down walls. That’s why, seven times, Paul talks about where “the oneness” is found. “*There is but one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all...*” And in that unity of spirit – that oneness – we offer to God what He has given to each and everyONE of us. Those things we offer to the Lord is a response to what we are one in – what we have been given first in oneness from God. They look like something. They are tangible. And yes, your Lord needs them for the sake of your neighbor and your church. That’s why we talk about our Time, Talent, and Treasure on a day like today. The oneness of Christ includes you and what you give. How blessed it is to break down dividing walls with the Gospel.

There is something in us that does not love a wall. There is something in us that loves healing and peace – that loves oneness in the Christ of Jesus Christ, in the blood He shed and the unity He brings. I spoke before about that poem that began with that line I just mentioned. There’s a story about that the author of that poem. In the summer of 1962, not long after the Berlin wall was erected, Robert Frost visited Russia and read some of this poem. The first line of that poem is said to have evoked a stony silence. A few months later, the day before Frost died, part of the wall crumbled because the ground had frozen under it. Remember that first line? It goes like this: “**Something there is that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun...**” Ironic...

We love walls and we don’t love walls. We love the way they protect us, but at the same time, when we are trying to reach others – to care with God’s love and peace – they become a hindrance. Breaking down walls in the proper way with God’s love and peace can bring the “oneness” – one faith, one Lord, one baptism – we so desire. The cross has done what no law could do. For, by His Gospel of love and forgiveness, by His cross the Lord has accepted us with all our disorders and diseases and defects and differences. He has gathered us into the newness of His healing. We have unity from Him: we have communion and reconciliation in Christ. That’s what we have. That’s what we need. May God richly bless you and keep you in the unity of God’s grace and the bond of peace. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.