

## **Pastor's Message – 7/18/2021**

Ephesians 2:14-22

You may have heard the line from Robert Frost's poem, Mending Wall, 'Good fences make good neighbors.' He writes that line twice in the poem, but I don't know that that line is the focus of the poem. It starts out,

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.

The work of hunters is another thing:

I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.

We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,

One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offense.  
 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.'

Every morning I listen to the news and hear about the divisions in our world, our State, our country. Every morning I hear about the squabbles between Democrats and Republicans and the competing groups and views in the world. Isn't Frost right, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall?" Walls and divisions seem to be the order of the day now and throughout history.

And it's not just politics. Martin Luther King Jr. claimed that 11:00 a.m. on Sunday is the most segregated hour in America. This observation remains mostly true even to this day. A 2012 National Congregations study directed by Duke University found that eight in ten American congregants attend services in settings in which one ethnic group comprises at least 80% of the membership. That hasn't changed much either. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

Other denominations have split, and you have probably heard that the United Methodist Church is probably heading in that direction. The pandemic of 2020 has postponed our General Conference until August of 2022 and separation proposals will be on the agenda. There were, at one time, 5 or more proposals under discussion, but, in the meantime, two major divisions are already underway.

One of those is called the **Liberation Methodist Connexion**. This new plan has been proposed since then to split the denomination according to beliefs on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex marriage.

LMX emerged from a series of meetings that began in May 2019 in Minneapolis after the 2019 General Conference imposed tighter restrictions against same-sex marriages and ordaining LGBTQ clergy in The United Methodist Church. The Minneapolis meeting, organized by the group UM Forward, developed a set of aspirations for a denomination that would be

radically inclusive of all persons, especially sexual minorities and people of color who have been historically harmed by The United Methodist Church.

The LMX seeks to embrace the “full participation of all who are living out their God-given identities and expressions,” according to the site. That includes people of all gender expressions and sexual identities, races and ethnicities, mental and physical abilities, sizes and ages.

Another that is already being formalized is **The Global Methodist Church** which, they say, “is committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, and the work of the Holy Spirit in conveying God’s truth and grace to all people.” It may be true that this Global Methodist Church would support The Traditional Plan favored by theologically conservative United Methodists, strengthening language in the United Methodist’s Book of Discipline barring LGBTQ clergy from being ordained and same-sex couples from marrying in the United Methodist Church.

Our District Superintendent asked me at our annual conversation the week before last where the Waupun United Methodist Church stands and where I stand personally regarding the sexuality issues facing the United Methodist Church. I don’t know that I can speak for this local Church, but I expect there will be a middle ground that I will want to be a part of. At any rate, separation is almost a given and every Bishop, every Conference, every clergy person, every local Church and every Professing Member will need to make a choice on which Church they will want to belong to.

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall.”

Disagreements and divisions are nothing new. In our Bible passage for today, Paul addresses the squabble that had arisen in the Ephesian community over the necessity of circumcision. Of course, the biggest reason this had become a major bone of contention is that it was a powerful symbol of fundamental differences between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. Paul, however, reminds the Ephesians that while these divisions may have once mattered, they are no longer important for all who are “members of the household of God”... and he points out the need to move beyond such petty factionalization.

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall.”

Paul writes to tell the Ephesians and to tell us “of God’s great love for us.” Every human change begins with God’s love for all of us. Where we see differences, God’s grace is a force for unity. We can either resist that movement or become part of it. It’s always tempting to resist — why join with someone who’s not as skilled, or as smart, or as special as we are? And yet

God offers this startling word that all of our mental divisions don't matter. In God's love, all of us share the same place.

The change that Jesus brings to our lives makes us all heirs of God's covenant, Paul tells the early church. Everything we once were, all of our cherished labels, Paul says, are now erased. Jews and Gentiles have been made equal in God's sight, by God's work through Jesus. The change in us, through Jesus, is so great that all of our former divisions become meaningless. All of us have been transformed in the same direction, moving us closer to God.

It is Jesus who doesn't love a wall. By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has broken down all the walls and barriers that keep us from God. He has offered himself as the cornerstone on which a unified people and world can be built. By his sacrifice, we are connected.

The cross is a symbol of connectedness. The sacrifice of Jesus brings separated parties together, and the cross itself serves as a symbol of this victory. Just look at the structure of the cross: The *vertical* beam is a symbol of the new connection between people and God, and the *horizontal* beam points to the connection between people, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, one to another. Through Christ, those who were "far away" and separated by sin have been "reconciled" and united through forgiveness.

Christ is our *peacemaker and our wall-breaker*, says Paul, "With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us." (v. 14). Christ makes peace between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, between black Americans and white Americans, between Baby Boomers and Millennials, between immigrants and the native-born, breaking down "barrier of hatred that divided us" (v. 14).

There is someone that doesn't love a wall.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to be part of that work of unity and tearing down the walls that divide us. But bridging this huge gap, which defined everything about daily life in Paul's world, is not something that human beings have to work on. God has already done it, Paul says. If this were our job, we would grow weary, or give up, but this is God's work.

Our job, though, is to live with this transformation. We are called to live in the kind of spiritual community that reflects this unity. Our transformation is a gift from God, and we pay it forward with lives full of welcome for other people, reflecting the welcome we have received. We are no longer strangers to one another, but people who share common roots. All who come in Christ's name, seeking Christ's peace, are welcome and it is in His name that we are built together as church.