



Those are ways we invite people to come to us. What about the ways we might reach beyond our walls to go to others. We do that now in the soup kitchen and food pantry. What might we do to help the situation of the homeless? There was a group in town that tried hard for several years to get a homeless shelter in this town, and never found their way beyond the town council. I don't know where that stands now, but I do know there are families who've spent the summer in campgrounds who will soon be looking for a place to spend the winter. And I know there are a staggering number of teens in this community who shuffle from one friend's home to another, with no place to call their own. Is there something we can do for them, or about their situation? We've increased our awareness about domestic violence and been very supportive of Derry's Domestic Violence Council – but what about child abuse? How many children are there in our community who are living with abuse in their own homes, at the hands of one or both parents? Should we be learning more about what it means to be a CASA volunteer or some other way of reaching beyond these walls to offer care and compassion and a place of safety?

One of the very real questions we struggle with is when walls need to come down and when they're necessary to provide safety and shelter. Or as Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" asks the question, was the farmer's father right when he said, "Good fences make good neighbors?" or is it more true that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that wants it down?" When is it that we need to come inside the walls and find a place for healing and rest, a place of shelter and comfort? And when it is that we need to go back out and continue to serve, reach beyond ourselves and welcome others in? Once in awhile, a stranger walks in to the church office and asks if the sanctuary is open, whether he or she can go up and sit and pray for a bit. What are we supposed to say to that? Prayer is a good thing – the very word sanctuary means welcome and safety – but who are we keeping safe – how wide does our welcome need to be. Honestly, some strangers look more safe and friendly than others, but who are we to know? Is that a time to keep the walls up or let them down a bit? Or perhaps open a door for awhile?

As difficult as it sometimes is to think about where and how we might reach beyond our walls, it's just as important, perhaps more important to look at the walls that exist within. Within this community and this room, as well as within our own hearts and lives and souls. What are the dividing walls of hostility that exist in here? Age old grievances or brand new wounds that lead us to turn away from people, that excuse us from speaking, that become the rationale for why things just can't be. I've lost track of the families where I've heard someone refer to a brother or sister, son or daughter, cousin or uncle with whom there is no conversation. A breach happened at some point, and now there's nothing but distance and silence. I'm watching a family now who's just been handed a brutal blow in the death of a mother whose will has inadvertently divided brothers and sisters – and I pray that they'll find a way through the hurt and pain, the arrogance of being placed in charge, and the victimization of having been left next to nothing. "The walls of fear that keep us so alone..."

There is an amazing gift that we've been given, and that's Christ's gift of reconciliation and healing. It's a gift that breaks down those dividing walls and uses the materials to build bridges in their place. The version of Ephesians 2 that we heard this morning says that

Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and

peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. (*The Message*, page 407)

Sometimes we see that miracle happen. Sometimes we watch in amazement and awe, like when the Berlin wall fell or Apartheid was dismantled – not quite sure how it was happening, but profoundly grateful that it was. Sometimes, we have to swallow a lot of pride, push ourselves way outside our comfort zone, muster up a heap of initiative in order to reach out, welcome in, offer a cup of cold water in Christ's name. It is God's hope that the walls will come tumbling down. And it is by Christ's grace that they do.

Play recording: "The Wall" by Don Eaton, verse 3