

Tearing Down Walls

Proper 11, Year B – Ephesians 2:11-22

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson July 19, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Before I do anything else, let me express Jenny and my thanks for your prayers and thoughts, and well wishes in the last week and a half. I trust by now that all of you know that our planned trip up to help my mother celebrate her eightieth birthday was rudely superseded by Jenny ending up in the hospital down in Clarksville. She is doing pretty well right now, but the atrial fibrillation that has damaged her heart over what the cardiologist calls a *long* time cannot be converted to proper rhythm until the aggressive medications they have given her have a month-long chance to melt away the half-inch blood clot they found in her left atrium. Although the doctor only said that she shouldn't "take any trips," primarily in the interest of making sure she stays near her doctors for these four or five weeks, in case of an emergency, for now *I* am the commuting spouse in our bi-locational life, and Jenny is grounded in Clarksville. We were both grounded in a much more profound way for several days, as we worried and waited through sleepless nights and frenetic days of monitors and IVs and procedures.

Now, most of you already know Jenny and I well enough to know that we watch what's probably way *too* much TV together. We have our favorite network shows like *America's Got Talent* and *Amazing Race*. We are *Downton Abbey* fans when it is in season, though not as rabid as *some* in the Parish. We watch the Food Network and the Travel Channel when we are in Clarksville where we have a more extensive cable package than I bother with here. And when we *are* here, we veg out with Netflix, where we are currently *re*-binging on our favorite British crime drama, *Midsomer Murders*.

But on one of the half dozen monitors in the ten-by-ten electronics-filled room that was pretty much our whole *world* for four days, we found our favorite programming – *HGTV*. We frequently enjoy seeing people shopping for houses, most of which are *waaay* out our range, in exotic places around the world, or places we've lived during our thirty-three years together. Perhaps because we so love our 900-square-foot home here on the corner of Center and Ingram, we are fascinated by the shows about so-called "tiny house living," including last Friday's new episode of *Tiny House Hunters* that featured a traveling nurse that happened to be *Jenny's* nurse that very same day.

Our favorite *HGTV* show, however, is a home improvement show called *Fixer Upper*, featuring what Jenny calls a "cute couple," Chip and Joanna that fix up houses in the Austin, Texas area. Those of you that also watch shows of that genre, know that one of the consistent features of such adventures is "demolition day," which inevitably involves crowbars and saws and sledgehammers being gleefully wielded by the shows' hosts and the new homeowners, breaking up tile, and peeling back carpet, and tearing off paneling, and pounding down walls.

Which *finally* brings us to this morning's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and that phrase that was running through my mind as I sat in that room shifting my gaze back and forth from one monitor to the other: "But now in Christ Jesus," Paul says, "you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For *he* is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."

As I sat there in our little cell, watching Chip extoll the almost therapeutic benefits of demolishing the unhelpful barriers to fulfilling Joanna's design dream for their current project, it occurred to me, that as a race, humankind is considerably more adept, and decidedly more *inclined*, to *building* walls than we are to tearing them down. In spite of the "progress" of the modern age, it seems that we are getting much better at the former, than we are at the latter. With

all our technological advances, with a communications revolution that rivals that of the fifteenth century development of the printing press, with the ability to fill our eyes and our ears and our minds with mind-numbing mountains of input every nano-second of the day, with an *exponentially* expanding grasp of the physical dimensions of the world around us, we are still remarkably adept at building *barriers*, at putting *up* walls, at distinguishing “us” from “them.”

We carefully and precisely and way too *energetically* define our “us-ness,” we humans. And we even *more* carefully define everyone else’s “them-ness.” Maybe we build those definitions on the basis of color, or tribe, or language, or accent. Maybe we build them on education, or pedigree, or some perceived *moral* superiority. Maybe we build them on economic status, or political or social affiliation, or style of worship. For pity’s sake, these days a whole *bunch* of us build our walls on whether our flag has stars-and-bars or a rainbow of colors. But we *always* build our walls by focusing on self – and by defining everything else as somehow less worthy of consideration. If we cannot reinforce those distinctions with rock and concrete, we do so at the point of a gun, or with a closed political process, or with a cash register. With war or with oppression or with simple smug superiority, we make sure that “they” understand that “we” are right and that they are either so backward, or so blind, or so... insignificant that their existence either offends us or simply doesn’t matter at all.

But for those of us who claim the name of Jesus Christ, those of us that are part of what our Presiding Bishop-elect is calling “the Jesus Movement,” that is *not* the design and dream of how we are called to build our lives. If we were able to look at the blueprints of the life that Christ would help us build, we might be quite surprised at the remarkably “open concept” of the floor plan. Because the plan of the Jesus Movement, the plan of the Gospel, the plan that God has ever dreamed for you and for me and for the whole of creation, simply does *not* provide for walls. The rooms of our hearts are not to be ordered by our pride-filled posturing, or by our petty preferences and prejudices, or even by our firmly held convictions of what forms the central core of who we are. The architecture of our heart is to be absolutely and completely dominated by the one who made us, and sustains us, and sanctifies us.

When we leave off building walls based on how the world defines our place, when we leave off building walls based on some self-perceived immutable identity, when we leave off building walls based on our own ideas of superiority, when we begin to understand that everything we are, everything we can ever hope to be, we find only in Christ’s *love* for us, then we *become* Christ’s, we become “members of the household of God,” Paul says, and we “are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

Thank you again for keeping Jenny and I in your prayers as we continue our journey to rebuild her heart. Let us pray together as well, that our Lord Jesus Christ will continue to rebuild *all* our hearts.