

“Jesus Doesn’t Love a Wall”  
The Rev. Lauren McDonald  
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, VA  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – July 19, 2009  
Ephesians 2:11-22

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” This is the opening line of Robert Frost’s poem, “Mending Wall.” Something there is that doesn’t love a wall. In the poem Frost describes spring wall mending. There is a stone wall between the narrator’s property and his neighbor’s, and over the course of the winter, gaps appear in the wall, though no one sees how they occur. Some come because hunters pull the stones down in an attempt to flush their prey out of hiding. Other gaps appear when the ground freezes in winter, pushing against the wall and knocking some of the stones down. However the breaks in the wall occur, the narrator in the poem meets up with his neighbor on a day in spring in order to walk the line of the wall and repair it.

The narrator wonders why they continue this ritual each year since the wall isn’t really needed. He thinks, “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 pine.” A wall is helpful when there are cows that need to be contained, but neither of them own cows. When the narrator brings up these issues, his neighbor says, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

“But why?” wonders the narrator. “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 offence.”

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.

Walls are built for many purposes. Some walls are built to keep something in. The narrator in Frost's poem acknowledges that good fences make good neighbors in places where there are cows. For people who own livestock, walls or fences are important barriers for keeping the animals contained. These barriers protect the animals from those who might come in to harm them. They also make certain that sheep and goats and cattle don't escape into neighbor's yards to destroy their gardens or flowers. Walls and fences help create boundaries that this is mine and that is yours. When used in this way, they can help keep the peace.

Walls are also built to keep *people* in. Sometimes these walls are intended for protection, like fences built around yards to keep children from wandering away and getting lost or hurt. But what about walls that are built to keep people in against their will? The most famous of these walls in our time is probably the Berlin Wall. It was constructed to prevent the people living in East Berlin from leaving to go to West Berlin. It divided families from each other. It prevented workers from getting to their jobs. It contained people in a prison from which they couldn't get free, and many of those who tried were shot. On November 9 we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Something there is that does not love a wall.

Although walls are frequently constructed to keep something in, they are also built with the intention of keeping something out. That something may be the danger of a wild animal or thief. Sometimes keeping things out protects them, like fences around swimming pools to keep people from accidentally drowning or barricades around areas containing hazardous materials. Often, though, the walls are created to exclude. They are walls built of fear, and they are not necessarily made of stone.

We make metaphorical walls to divide ourselves from those with whom we disagree. We make walls that say “I am in” and “you are out.” We make walls so that we can be separated from those who are different from us. We make walls and laws and rules and barriers, and we hide behind them thinking that we will be safe, that those on our side of the wall are right and those on the other side of the wall are wrong. Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, That wants it down.

Walls are not a new thing. In the time of Jesus and in the time following his death and resurrection, there were also walls of division. One of the most important of these walls was that between Jews and Gentiles. For thousands of years prior to Jesus’ birth, it had been clear that Jews belonged to Yahweh, the one God of Israel, and Gentiles did not. God had made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. The sign of this covenant was circumcision. “I shall be your God,” said God, “And you shall be my people.” The Gentiles were not part of the covenant. They were unclean, worshipers of idols, people to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. When Paul and Peter began preaching the Good News to the Gentiles, there was huge controversy. How could the wicked, unclean, idol-worshipping Gentiles be included in the salvation won by Jesus for Israel?

This is what the author of the letter of Ephesians is writing about. Clearly he is writing to Gentiles newly won to Christ, reminding them that at one time they were aliens from Israel, strangers to the covenants, having no hope and no God. But because of Jesus, these Gentiles who were once far off are now brought near. “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. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in

one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.” Jesus has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us. Between Jews and Gentiles. Between rich and poor. Between pure and impure. Between healthy and sick. Between those who are in and those who are out. Between the powerless and the powerful. Between us and them. Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.

Jesus doesn’t love a wall, and the claim of our lesson from Ephesians is that he has broken down the dividing wall between us. Though specifically referring to the wall between Jews and Gentiles, it could mean any wall of hostility that we have created as a barrier between us. I doubt Jesus cares much about the walls that we put up to keep the cows from eating the neighbors’ flowers. But I think he cares a lot about the walls we put up as barriers to loving our neighbors. Barriers of classism, sexism, racism. Barriers between liberals and conservatives, between evangelicals and Anglo-catholics, between those who interpret the Bible one way and those who interpret it a different way. Jesus has already broken down the walls between us. We are one in him. We are no longer strangers and aliens; we are members of the household of God.

Someone there is who doesn’t love a wall. Who wants it down. That someone is Jesus. He spent his life crossing the barriers that people put before him, and through his death and resurrection he broke those dividing walls down. If we believe that Jesus has reconciled us to God, if we believe that Jesus has reconciled us to each other, if we believe that we are members of the household of God, members who love God and love our neighbors, then we won’t feel the need to build the walls back up again.