



Do Walls Make Good Neighbors?

Acts 11:1-18

*May 19th, 2019 ~ 5th Sunday in Easter
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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Text: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." (v. 9)

Do walls make good neighbors?

Robert Frost pondered this question in his poem *The Mending Wall*.

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 ...

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 again.

We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

We wear our fingers rough with handling them. ...

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 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.
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."

(Mending Wall, circa 1914)

In our lesson from Acts the Apostle Peter is asked to give an account as to why he fellowshiped with "uncircumcised Gentile believers". These Gentiles were "different". The uncircumcised were "dirty", "unworthy". They were not "the people of the Promise". You may have heard the phrase in some of our current denominations, "unequally yoked"? Being "unequally yoked" they could not "commune" together. Well, these gentiles were "unequally yoked". They were "out".

One communion Sunday when my wife Sue and I served as co-pastors in a previous church, worshipers came forward to receive the sacrament. One family happened to have a guest staying with them. She was from one of the Southeast Asian countries. With the rest of the worshipers she, too, came forward. She took a piece of bread from the offered loaf and dipped it into the communion cup. We suspected that she was not Christian--in fact, we were pretty sure that she wasn't. But, the Table is the Lord's Table, not ours. The Holy Spirit moves the hearts of those whom it chooses. As Jesus said, it is like the wind; we cannot know from whence it comes or where it goes but we can see and feels its movement in our lives and in the world.

A few days later this visitor came to our home with an offering; a dozen Asian egg rolls carefully made by hand. As she presented them to my wife she said, "You fed me; now I feed you." This was truly a holy moment, thin place between heaven and earth where the movement of the Spirit of God trumped the wall so carefully constructed by theology. Sometimes our theology can become walls of our own making.

Peter explained that he had a dream--a vision, of sorts. He was in Joppa and fell into a trance. Something like a large sheet descended from heaven. On the sheet were animals. As he looked closely at the sheet she saw that some of the animals were "unclean" and not to be kept or eaten. But Peter also heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat."

"Oh, I can't do that, Lord, for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth." The voice replied, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times before the vision disappeared.

It was then that strangers appeared--three men. They led him to a house where the Holy Spirit fell upon those gathered in that house just as the Holy Spirit fell upon the gathered at Pentecost.

Speaking to his questioners, Peter continued, "If God poured the Spirit upon them, who am I to stand in the way?"

Have you ever wondered if God is a bigger God than we feel comfortable with having?

As one wag quipped, “God made Man (sic) in the divine image, and Man (sic) returned the favor”.

We fruitlessly try to make God small, to confine God to our likes and dislikes, our prejudices, our notions of who’s in and who’s out, who’s deserving and who’s undeserving. Whenever we do this we miss the fullness of God. Jesus once said that God makes the rain fall upon the good and the bad, the just and the unjust alike. We need to be careful lest we miss the width and depth of God’s amazing Grace.

There is a lot in this world that we do not understand and may never understand. But we need to understand this: there is something that doesn’t love a wall.

To God be the glory.

Amen.