

A Pentecost 16 2017 Matthew 18:15-20

When a seminary friend moved from Ohio to CA, I asked her how she liked it and what was the hardest to get used to. I was thinking traffic or earthquakes.

She told me that the hardest thing to get used to was all the walls. Her home has a wall around her backyard, another around the front garden and even another along the street. Her church has walls around their courtyard and of course some neighborhoods, not hers, are walled off to. She told me *“I don’t even know what my neighbors look like.”*

When I asked her about the earthquakes, in typical California humor she said, *“Well that would take care of the walls wouldn’t it.”*

I think that when a community ceases to be a community, it builds walls: privacy walls, retaining walls, security walls, chain link fence walls. And more recently a border wall. Now I know that many of us have fences in our yards. We have one along the back of our property.

And I know that some of you are thinking that *“Good fences make good neighbors.”* In other words it cuts down on arguments, but actually that adage is from the Poem, Mending Fences, in which Robert Frost is trying to convince his neighbor to not rebuild the fence between their properties.

No matter what the fence looks like, the message is the same: *“That’s your side; this is my side; don’t get in my space!”*

Building walls is not a new thing. We can think of the wall of Jericho, the Great wall of China, Hadrian’s Wall, the Berlin wall or even the Saksaq Waman wall in Peru. All of these had unintended consequences by the way,

There are also walls that are not built of stone that are not visible but divide, all the same.

Today’s Gospel lesson from Matthew was written for a community that was divided by cultural identity. Who did Jesus come to save? The Rabbinic Jews? The Christians? The Gentiles? What side of the divide was Jesus on? The community divided was the church. The walls were not brick and mortar. Instead they were anger, arrogance, elitism, purity, wealth, narrow-mindedness, self-centeredness, and selfishness... all of the same things that divide us today.

In the end, we could call, all these things by one word: sin. It is sin that separates us from each other. Sin isolates us, walls us in, and gives us the illusion that we are safe, private, self-sufficient, and independent.

There is a myth in Western culture fostered by our misunderstanding of individual rights.

The myth is that it doesn’t matter what we do or don’t do, just so long as it doesn’t bother or harm someone else.

That sounds good, but very little of what we do, if anything, is done in a vacuum that does not touch the lives of others.

**If we are loving parents, our children are likely to be loving, friendly playmates.** And if our children are kind and loving then they are likely to be good playmates who then go on to be kind and loving to others. Ultimately the neighborhood and our children's classrooms are effected.

On the other hand, if we are unfaithful to our spouse, or cheat an employer, even if no one finds out, all of our relationships are effected.

When we break our commitments to our family or our co-workers, the whole fabric of how we relate to one another changes.

If we tell racist jokes or laugh at them, even if it is just among friends, we are perpetuating an attitude that effects all of our society and encourages the belief that some are created more equal than others and we give subtle permission for acts of discrimination.

**In the end all sin is community sin, if one person sins, the whole community is involved.**

A good image might be 6 people in a **life boat**. If one of those 6 drills a hole in the bottom of the boat the others have a vital interest in his actions.

All sin is community sin in that it divides the community. This is our predicament! Ezekiel asks: *How then shall we live?*

**Luther, emphasizes forgiveness and service.**

**We are free to serve in love.**

Acts of love, big or small have the power to break down the walls that divide us and build up new community.

We've seen this in the midst of Hurricanes Harvey & Irma.

**Two neighbors:** one pulls a gun for an extra gallon of gas and another, not only shares his gas, but gives strangers rides to safety.

**God's truth is that no wall can contain Christ.**

That's the message of Easter.

The walls of the tomb could not contain the risen Christ. No one and no thing can prevent the goodness and the good news of God's love and forgiveness from spreading.

So this is God's Work; Our Hands Weekend.

ELCA congregations across the nation are leaving the walls of their church buildings and serving their neighbors. These acts of service are acts that have the potential to build loving community.

**Tomorrow we have 15 different service projects** including cooking a meal for Father Carr, helping out Av's wild life sanctuary, and a local animal shelter, Feeding America, washing windows for two widows in our congregation, tying blankets and the list goes on.

You are here tonight and may not return tomorrow, but we ask that you consider serving your neighbor in some way. Even the smallest act can make a difference.

And the thing is, as we reach out, we can confront our own role in the brokenness of the world, confident in God's grace and forgiveness.

**And of course we never go alone.**

We have the presence of Christ with us – *wherever two or three are gathered.*

This is the good news of God's Work our Hands Weekend;  
This is the good news of the Gospel.

Short meditation for GWOH Day.

Today is God's Work; Our Hands Sunday. We are joining congregations all across the country as we serve our neighbors, near and far.

Years ago I heard a parable, perhaps told by Herb Brokering, that went something like this:  
Once upon a time there was a very important and wealthy congregation that worshiped in a beautiful, church with a soaring steeple and gleaming dark wood interior.  
No window was without heavy stained glass.

**The people treasured their church.**

It had cost their parents and grandparents a great deal of money.

**They were proud of their ancestors** for the sacrifices they had made.

They loved worshiping in their church because when they walked through its doors, they could leave the cares and concerns of the world behind.

It was a beautiful church...but the congregation was shrinking.

And then one night, during the bombing of WWII the south and east walls. Came down. For along time they worshiped in the bombed out building.

And what happened was a God thing. People in the neighborhood could see in and the congregation could see their neighbors and all of the work that needed to be done to rebuild people's lives. The people of the congregation could no longer leave the world out