



## Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

**Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!**

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

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### ***“Can These Walls Tumble Down, Too?” – Ephesians 2:11-22***

*8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – July 22, 2018*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

My dear family in Christ, it seems to me that the phrase that is most commonly remembered or quoted from Robert Frost's poem *“Mending Wall”* is **“Good fences make good neighbors.”** That's ironic, since the point to be made by the person sharing with us the story about the annual wall mending work is **“Something there is that doesn't love a wall.”**

Let me share a bit with you. **“The gaps I mean, No one has seen them made or heard them made, But at spring mending-time we find them there. I let my neighbour know beyond the hill; And on a day we meet to walk the line And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go. It comes to little more: 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 neighbours.” Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder If I could put a notion in his head: “Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it Where there are cows? But here 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 offence. Something there is that doesn't love a wall,**

**That wants it down."**

Easter tells us there is also someone who doesn't love a wall: Christ Jesus. What Paul calls the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down. Long before you or I took our first breath, it happened when Jesus was crucified and then raised from the dead. Every time we gather for worship we rejoice that Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins. Every time we rejoice that His resurrection opened the arms of God and the gates of heaven to all believers. We delight to receive every single gift that His death and resurrection give us. <sup>13</sup> **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** <sup>14</sup> **For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** (v13-14).

Unfortunately, the body of Christ, His Church, has not always gratefully received the gift Paul describes for us this morning – a broken-down wall. In the text it's probably difficult to empathize with the hostility experienced when the onrush of the Gentile Christians crowded out the Jewish Christians. We haven't experienced being treated as second-class citizens in God's kingdom by those acknowledged as the chosen people; we haven't been told that our men have to be circumcised first in order to be saved, or that we'd have to abstain from pork, or shrimp if we want to be first-class citizens of God's kingdom.

Thankfully, there has never been a time when we haven't had access to God through the Holy Spirit. The wall Christ Jesus demolished we never saw standing!

But, consider this: what happens to a city when an invader knocks down the wall that protects the citizens inside and the invaders take over the city? Do they leave the wall in ruins? No. they immediately rebuild it so that they have security from a future invader.

That is the problem that the church has continued to face in our sinfulness. Due to that sinfulness we are prone to establish identity markers concerning who really belongs, who is truly welcome. We quite naturally lean into an “us versus them” mentality.

Part of that is any number of fears and prejudices we bring with us into this place. In certain places it can be the changing neighborhood around a church’s property. A worship service in another language might mean that eventually a different group of people might outnumber the older guard and take over the congregation.

It could be the differing ways that generations have of understanding or communicating. Does paying attention to the way we reach out to Millennials or the amount of investment we’ve made in providing for families in need of childcare mean that we don’t care for the older generations?

And then there are the times when political messages creep into our time together. It’s a careful line to walk in maintaining a theological understanding of issues, attitudes and behaviors so that this does not become a Red congregation or a Blue congregation, welcoming Democrats and not Republicans or vice versa. Those divisions in our country are as serious as I’ve seen them in my lifetime.

While each of us is prone to bring our own bricks and mortar to the party, while each special interest group can begin to stir the cement mixer and trowel it on thickly, Paul has some important words for us. Where does one find true relief from fear, true security and unanimity?

Christ is our peace! The messages from His apostles and prophets are the foundation, but not for a wall. They are the foundation for the holy temple that God’s people are meant to be!

Society will still try to shame people into changing. Society will continue to enact laws to bring about conformity. In the Church, however, things work differently. The first step in tearing down walls separating us and building on Christ Jesus' salvation is repentance.

It begins with confessing that God is not pleased when we try to replace a wall that His Son demolished with a different one. It means confessing we have either been wall builders or that we have been complicit in such wall building by our silence. We have sinned. And Christ Jesus is our peace. To His cross and tomb we go for forgiveness and healing. If His death meant the demolition of such walls separating us from God and one another, what does His life mean if not the power and opportunity to make a new start?

Later in this letter Paul urges us to be **“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”** (4:3). That doesn't mean we can eradicate differences of skin color, ethnicity, or political thought. It doesn't mean that we only try to get along better. It means, instead, that one subjects all of those difference to Jesus. If such differences do not matter to Him, they should not matter to His people.

In Romans Paul writes **“Welcome one another as Christ has welcome you”** (15:7). Just as Jesus welcomed you into the family of God in baptism, forgiving your sins through His death and resurrection, giving you peace, promising you eternal life in His name, so He has welcomed every other person who believes in Him.

Jesus does not say “no” to those with tattoos or piercings. He does not say “no” to those without. Jesus doesn't exclude you on the basis of what the make, model and year of your car is. He does not reject or welcome only Germans, Persians or central Americans.

What Jesus does want us to do is to repent by no longer making those issues of first important. He wants us to stop making anything a matter of pride or privilege. In his letter to the

Colossians Paul sets our aim clearly: “that in everything [Christ] might be preeminent” (Col. 1:18).

In June of 1987, when he visited Berlin, President Ronald Reagan challenged the leader of the Soviet Union with the words **“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”** He was of course referring to the Berlin wall that had separated West Germany from communist East Germany. Spray painted on that wall would be the phrase **“This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.”**

Eventually that wall came down. Will belief eventually become reality for the people of God, too? The Spirit is still at work changing hearts. Jesus still forgives and empowers. John’s vision of a multitude no one could number from all tribes, languages, and races still stands.

In truth, the reality is already there. We are one in Christ Jesus our Lord. God grant that we can put that reality into practice in having the walls of separation come tumbling down. Amen.