

Mending Wall

E4-19, Feb. 3, 2019
Lk 4:21-30

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Mending Wall is a poem by Robert Frost.

He observes that walls are an unnatural human invention and questions the need for walls.

In older times landowners marked their property by building rock walls on the borders.

Rocks are plentiful in most fields, and stable.

And rocks can't be use for much other than building.

Frost asks in this poem, "but why *walls*?"

We here in Minnesota know frost heaves in roads.

Potholes and cracks appear in spring from the frozen ground of winter.

In the first lines of Frost's poem he alludes to this power

that heaves the ground and throws down walls:

*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.*

Walls are not natural.

Walls are imposed on creation and over time are defeated by natural forces.

Walls that divide are something God neither intends or desires.

Frost heaves throw down stone walls.

In the verses just before our gospel reading,

Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah about God bringing release to captives.

Jesus is political.

Jesus is Lord over *all* creation, including government and politics.

The *Good News* of Jesus, Savior and Lord,

confronts unjust powers and self-serving potentates.

Jesus is political.

Following Jesus will always be political.

Good News that Jesus brings

will release the captives of unfair judgements,

will set at liberty those oppressed,

will send forth as forgiven, with all debts and obligations erased.

Good News that Jesus brings confronts entrenched powers

and thereby is political.

Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah,

set down the scroll and all eyes watched.

His audience seems to be pleased with the words he read

and with this local boy sounding so good.

"They spoke well of him,

and wondered at the gracious words that came out of his mouth."

But Jesus goes on as if to say,

"No. I am not speaking of us here.

I am speaking of God blessing upon those you don't like,

God blessing those you want kept away,

God blessing those you fear and call enemies."

God's vision and God's kingdom

is far larger and far more generous

than what we feel comfortable with,

and far greater than what we think right.

God's blessing comes upon all people created in God's image.

Jesus then pushes the point.
 He reminds them of the Old Testament examples
 of God favoring *Israel's enemies* over the supposedly righteous people of Israel.
 And the listeners of Jesus suddenly turned murderously angry at him.
 God's blessing comes even to undocumented Mexicans,
 even to Muslims, even to the unseen thief who stole your car.
 And suddenly God's grace pushes too far.
 Suddenly our own anger rises too;
 where is the sense of right and wrong?

Robert Frost continues,

*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 neighbor 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.
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. 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 neighbors.'*

Good fences make good neighbors.
 Good fences mark off possessions and keep clear who is entitled to what.
 Good fences keep safe, keep dangers at bay.
 Good fences keep cattle from straying,
 keep neighbors from encroaching,
 keep undesirables away,
 keep fearsome immigrants from coming in.
 Good fences make good neighbors.
 But fences seem favored by the privileged,
 those who want to keep for themselves what is meant for all.

Jesus disagrees.

Jesus does not approve.
 If one is God's child,
 if one belongs to God and lives according to the ways of God, there is no need for walls.
 If one is one of God's people,
 there is no need for walls *because there are no enemies.*
 Those we would rather ban and block and banish and bar
 are the very ones *Jesus* calls "brother," calls "sister."

Now I know in this hostile world good walls make sense,
 and I lock my doors at night.
 We want our homes safe while we sleep.

We want our children safe,
 and yet so seldom is there concern for *other's* children,
 children who don't have enough to eat,
 children who don't have schools,
 children sick and without health care,
 children abused and exploited even in our metro area,
 children who are left at risk when parents have to work.

In this hostile world good walls make good neighbors
 only by keeping neighbors away.

We are too quick to fear.
 Screaming headlines and fear mongering is good for TV business.
 Social media runs warp-speed with gossip, lies, bigotry, slander.
 And soon adamant, deep-felt unfounded fears substitute for truth.

We see bogey-man in darker faces.
 We "tsk" the single mom struggling to feed her children.
 We want walls with Mexico.

Even should good walls make good neighbors,
 even when there is need for walls to keep safe,
 at least we might *question* the need before jumping to conclusions.
 Walls as therapy to ease our fears is neither natural or godly.

Jesus came to save and redeem *the world*,
 that means *everyone*,
 that means those who are threatening,
 that means those we don't want to be around.

From the very start, Jesus makes this clear.
 From the very start of his ministry,
 sitting in the synagogue of his hometown,
 Jesus makes it clear that God's kingdom includes every person on this planet,
 and that God's mercy extends to every single person
 whether we like it or not.

That is hard news.
 That is what made the locals in our gospel reading mad at Jesus.

We prefer to know
 who is acceptable and who is not,
 who is righteous and who is less,
 who is favored and who deserves God's anger.

We prefer distinctions between us who are worthy
 and the struggling, impoverished, addicted, immoral.

We want divisions that ensure privilege.

But whenever we make distinctions,
 whenever we put up walls between us and them,
 whenever we see enemies,
Jesus will always be on the other side.

When we create division
 we will always find Jesus *on the other side.*

I am so very grateful for this church.
 I am so very grateful for your desire to welcome as Jesus welcomes.
 You have a reputation of seeing past walls, of stepping across divisions.
 I have much to learn from you, from Christ in you.
 May your witness continue to breach and break walls.
 Amen.