

# SERMON STARTER

## EPHESIANS 2:14-22 (NRSV)

*<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. <sup>17</sup>So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup>for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup>in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*

There are a lot of references to walls in the Bible. Most specifically, there are a lot of times when the act of faith involves breaking down walls. Blowing the trumpet at Jericho. We learn of Jerusalem's walls, and how Nehemiah rebuilt them. The Bible tells us about scaling walls, breaking down walls, spies climbing walls ... whether in literal construction or figurative use, walls are meant to divide. Protect. Insulate. Keep things as they are.

Ephesians is a book largely about being cemented in God's power, and not power found on earth — power, say, imposed by a government. Or implied by a wall. Rather, Paul's goal here is to bring the power of connection and community to a church that would rather stay hunkered, insulated, terrified of the world around itself — not the way Christ modeled faith in God.

We have many, many examples of walls in our modern lives. One not so close to home is found in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Ebola is turning neighbor against neighbor. Aid workers are harassed and even assaulted. Dr. William Clemmer leads the Ebola response for Lutheran World Relief. He says health care workers — even those native to the area — face threats to their lives for associating or collaborating with the Ebola response.

The reason for this is that people there are fearful that Ebola is a tool used by foreigners to control and even kill off Congolese people. It is a fear that prompts misinformation and distrust. Once a family contracts Ebola in their household, it is common for others in the community to shun them, freezing them out of community.

Imagine what that means when a family breadwinner can no longer work or is even claimed by the virus itself. There is no help and the isolation often keeps the broader health community from even knowing Ebola exists there.

Ebola has become a wall. It is a wall we can help to tear down, a unique mission our church and the church at large can and must play in this crisis that has killed thousands.

In this text from Ephesians, Paul places the mission of connecting and uniting humanity squarely on the shoulders of Christ's church. It is a mission we undertake despite the odds and a long, learned history that may have us stay insulated.

The suggestion here is not to get closer to someone who has Ebola. Here, the physical protection of the wall is needed! But what we can do is help to break down walls that are turning neighbor against neighbor. By sharing our gifts, we can make sure children can remain enrolled in school. We can make sure a family who has lost a breadwinner does not go hungry. Our gifts can help maintain community that would ultimately become divided. We can be the presence of Christ in the world.



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