

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
Barboursville, West Virginia
July 5, 2020

Prelude

Call to Worship Luke 4:18

Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor
and release to the captives.

Opening Prayer

In times of weakness and in our hour of need,
your's is the strength by which we carry on,
the shoulder we rest our head upon.

When our load is heavy and too much to bear,
your's are the arms stretched out to help us,
the grace we depend on.

In times of weakness and need,
your voice is heard,

“Come...find rest.”

This is grace divine,
the path we tread to wholeness,
of body and spirit,
the path that leads to you,
and to whom we offer our sacrifice of praise. Amen.

John Birch, *Faith and Worship*

Hymn This Is My Song

Text: Lloyd Stone, Georgia Harkness

Music: Jean Sibelius

This is my song, O God of all the nations.
A song of peace, for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.
But other hearts in other lands are beating
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine.
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
So hear my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

This is my prayer, O Lord of all earth's kingdoms,
thy kingdom come, on earth thy will be done.
Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him,
and hearts united learn to live as one.
So hear my prayer, O God of all the nations,
myself I give thee; let thy will be done.

Scripture Reading Ephesians 2:11-22
The Message “Walls”

The world is full of walls. Everywhere we go, there are fences, gates, security check points, toll Booths - all aimed at keeping order and often to keep something or someone in and something or someone out.

We need walls: walls in our homes to protect us from wind and rain and extreme temperatures; walls to assure us of privacy: fences and barn doors to keep livestock safe and predators out; walls to indicate separate spaces, define ownership and assign responsibility.

In these past several months we've seen visible and invisible walls erected to protect the public from catching the Corona-virus. We've seen stations set up for temperature readings at the entrance to schools and hospitals. We've been advised to wear masks. Wearing a mask is a sort of wall - a barrier between one person and the next to diminish the likelihood of spreading the disease.

Walls can be both literal and figurative; walls can even have a spiritual nature. Walls can be helpful and walls can lead to grief, division and violence. All walls serve a purpose; but not all walls serve the purposes of God.

In this Ephesians passage, we read that 'Christ has 'broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. It's difficult to imagine how this can possibly happen, especially today, when hostility seems to be the bread and butter of human relating and living.

Pastor G. Kevin Baker says, if we are really honest with ourselves, then we have to acknowledge that we may have contributed to this wall-building. He says we have built many walls, not out of bricks and mortar, but out of the raw material of sin and division. Then we've cemented them with the mortar of name-calling, labeling and prejudice.

That's a harsh statement and it may be offensive to us. I don't call people names and neither do you. I think we keep our prejudices to a minimum. But, let's dig a little deeper into the text.

A poor application of the Torah is what created this wall of hostility mentioned in the text. In the growing Christian community, there was hostility between the circumcised insiders against the uncircumcised outsiders. Gentile converts had less status than Jewish converts. Perspective and power shift depending on what side of the wall a person is standing. So, the circumcised probably had privileges, or had a stronger voice, than the uncircumcised, even though both groups were now part of the Christian community. This led to conflict and fracture. The Christian community should not be divided by such walls of hostility. It is an offense to God and denies the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus.

I don't have to remind you of this: for months this nation has been consumed by an explosive issue: immigration. It has created great debate and angst among the citizens. Everyone here probably has a well-reasoned opinion about how it might be resolved. But, we lack one significant ingredient that should be a part of the conversation: unless I'm wrong: none of us is an immigrant and we lack the experience of being the alien, the outsider.

Being an American citizen is taken for granted far too often. I learned this as a child in school and it was reinforced at home: value your citizenship. It is a gift to honor and protect and pass on to the next generation. To become a citizen can be a long, complicated and expensive process. One of my daughters made it a part of her life's work to help immigrants become naturalized American citizens. But, in the US today, it has become a controversial process.

While we cannot solve the immigration situation, maybe we should examine the walls that are erected between Christians. I read an article yesterday that described the way many denominations, including ours, split over the Civil War and how long it took to reconcile and reunite. We have the benefit of hindsight and can correctly call these divisions a scandal to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who broke down barriers and welcomed everyone to a new way of life in his kingdom. But I doubt we could be so clear-minded in the throes of that era.

What about our era? There are walls still. We don't have to look very far to find friends and families who have suffered terrible conflicts and estrangement because they interpret scripture differently, or join churches that have different standards for leadership and ordination. This can result in calling each others' faith and practice defective.

How then can this word from Ephesians help us? The unity referred to here is not manufactured by human hands busy trying to promote multiculturalism and tolerance. The peace described here is not just a ceasing of conflict or the absence of violence. The hope alluded to is not merely a hankering after international experiences or cross-cultural encounters.

Here, unity, peace and hope are not things at all. They are a person. Christ is our peace. In his flesh he has broken down the dividing wall. In Christ's death on the cross, peace has been achieved and hostility has been crucified. Jesus is the singular wrecking crew that demolishes division and gifts us with unity, peace and reconciliation.

What do these gifts look like for us?

Well, I discovered how one community is receiving the gift and passing it on.

Jeff Richards is an evangelist for the Presbytery of Sacramento. He started the Word Hose, with the intention of dismantling the things that separate the church from the rest of our lives. In other words, to present the church in a way that relates to the life of our neighbors, family and friends. He strives to reach people who may have written off the church or who have never been interested at all.

The Word House meets in houses, pubs, and coffeehouses. People seek to make worship, fellowship, mission and discipleship integrated, not segmented, activities.

Worship takes place in a living room or a public space and begins with people checking in with one another. Richards says "people are pretty open about their struggles and pain." They may talk about what's important and relevant and learn to listen to fellow members and visitors.

Then they look at scripture. People are encouraged to ask questions, learning from the history and the characters, and exploring how the text applies to their own lives. They are asked, "How are we part of God's story?"

Once a month, the church hosts a pot-luck meal that begins with an Invitation to the Table. Communion is literally celebrated as a meal taken together.

Fellowship extends beyond the social hall. The members go out into the community together, to a restaurant or to have coffee, or hang out downtown or in the local park.

As for mission, it takes place with organizations that already exist in the neighborhood. They seek places where God is already at work and join God there. Many work with children having limited resources. They also go out into the streets to take hot drinks to the homeless. They have hosted Christmas gatherings for families who don't have homes.

Discipleship is very important to Word House. It is about sharing what's going on in your life and how it relates to God. It's socializing and connecting with people and sharing God's love, inviting them into genuine faith and life.

The Word House represents a trend away from the "bigger is better" mentality and toward smaller, deeper community. We see this trend when consumers move from patronizing big-box stores to supporting farmers' markets and microbreweries.

People who long for a spiritual life are moving away from the slickly-programmed, performance-centered mega-churches they grew up in, to small, intense, and highly relational communities. As one of thousands at a mega-church, it can be difficult to have much of a voice about the direction of the church. But at Word House, the participants are part of creating each service and the vision of the ministry.

They strive to live out what we call "the priesthood of all believers:"

I know you're wondering if this church without walls ministry can be sustained. Richards says he can't imagine needing a bigger space even though the church is growing. The hope is that new groups would be spun off existing ones, similar to the Church of the Savior in Washington, DC. He says there is no plan to buy or build a meeting place. Buildings often outlast their usefulness and churches sometimes exist to maintain bricks and mortar rather than ministry. Word House hopes to avoid that trouble.

The Presbyterian Church is still promoting an initiative called **1001 New Worshiping Communities**. Christians near and far away are reading their culture, their neighbors, and their communities, to understand their spiritual needs. There is a great deal of deconstructing barriers in order to make way for the household of God, a household built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."

May Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church be such a place... a holy temple ... a dwelling place for God.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Eternal God,

On this weekend, when we celebrate the founding of this nation, we come seeking your blessing.

Rule the hearts of your servants and all those in authority,

that they may do justice, love mercy, and walk in the ways of truth.

Bless and defend all who work for our safety and protection,

and shield them from danger and adversity.

To all nations grant unity, peace, and concord;

and provide their citizens with dignity, food, and shelter;

grant abundant harvests, strength and skill to conserve earth's resources, and wisdom to use them well.

Enlighten with your Spirit those who teach and all who learn;

come to the help of all who are in peril, need, or trouble;

protect all travelers.

Show mercy to all prisoners and captives.

Strengthen and preserve those who live as families;

protect all children, and comfort the aged, the bereaved and the lonely;

defend the refugees and the homeless, the unemployed, and all who are in despair.

Heal all those who are sick of mind, body, or spirit, and give skill and compassion to all

caregivers.

Instill in us a conscience that makes us aware of our sins; forgive us when we have done wrong or failed to act;

strengthen us by your spirit and hold us fast in the fellowship of your Church.

We boldly pray as Jesus taught us, saying, **Our Father...Amen.**

Blessing

Shine, O Lord, upon the homely mosaic of West Virginia's land: upon her steep-hewn hills and angled draws, her maple-strewn valleys and ridges clad in mountain rhododendron.

Shine, Lord, upon her citizens, armed only with freedom, scrappers all for such measure of dignity as fearlessness and faith may win.

Shine, O God, into those deep recesses where Thou hast abundant riches, that those who dig in the earth, and those who watch for their return, may know the radiance of thy light and the safety of thy love,

Bright be cleaning fire of Thy truth in the hearts of the people, and in the public weal of their common life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Washington National Cathedral, prayed for the week starting March 1, 2020

Announcements

Worship services will resume at Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church, 955 Main St., Barboursville, WV, on July 12, 2020. Weather permitting, we will meet outside. Safety measures will be observed, including the wearing of masks and physical distancing. We will continue to offer worship through the church website for those who prefer to remain at home at this time.

A congregational meeting will be held at the beginning of worship on July 12, for the purpose of electing the next class of Ruling Elders and a church Trustee. The nominees for Ruling Elder are Kevin Dennison, Nancy McIntosh, J.T. Roach, and John R. Thomas. The nominee for Trustee is Steve Gold.

May God bless all those who graciously accept the call to Christian service.