

Kingdom Without Walls



Observing Mother Teresa's work with India's "untouchables," Poet Sydney Carter was moved to reflect: "Let love be dangerous."

"Christ has broken down the dividing walls!" – Ephesians 2

1st break:

Discuss "radical equality" and "radical grace" in terms of what occurred in Billings, Montana.

2nd break:

When Spong talks about the story of Jonah he refers to "human prejudice" and various types of "boundaries." What types of boundaries do you encounter and how do you deal with them?

3rd break:

What has Mel White learned along his Spiritual Journey?

What other practices or characteristics of the human condition might be included in the "natural" vs. "un-natural" conversation?

4th break:

Describe the “humanity beyond our prejudices” to which we are called.

How do you see prejudices and insecurities being intertwined?

The “body of Christ” is just one New Testament image in which difference is honored. Explain.

What’s the common denominator?

General Reflection:

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

Spirit Practice

In his book *Conspiracy of Goodness**, Donald Messer tells of a young Quaker missionary who contracted typhus and died suddenly. All cemeteries at that time were Catholic and unavailable for burials of people of other beliefs. The only option was to bury this beloved missionary outside the cemetery. The following day when people visited the grave, they discovered the fence had been moved to include the missionary's grave.

Spend time in reflection and write two lists: 1) the ways and places you have witnessed or been a part of any wall being dismantled and 2) any barrier around the globe that you believe needs to be dismantled. Then consider ways you can be a fence mover.

*Messer, Donald E., *Conspiracy of Goodness*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 127.

Words of Wisdom

Over and over, Hebrew Scripture lists three groups of people as worthy of special kindness, extra thoughtfulness, and intentional consideration: strangers, widows, and orphans.

Read Leviticus 19.10; Deuteronomy 10.18; 14.29

"Strangers" are listed with "widows and orphans" because strangers were alone, lacking any kinship-connection that would otherwise protect and support them. Jesus ate with the outcast and the stranger and preached that "whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do to me." Paul defines the mark of the true Christian as one who extends hospitality to strangers.

Read Matthew 25.31-45 & Romans 12:13

The anonymous author of Ephesians says, they used to be "aliens," strangers, they had "no hope." But "in Christ Jesus" these strangers become part of a common humanity with believers. The dividing walls have been "broken down." "Don't exclude people because they aren't the way you want them to be. Remember, not too long ago, *you* were the strangers and some wanted you to be circumcised to be part of the fellowship. Remember that?"

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

-- Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy & Leviticus

Try it

Use the words to Farquharson and Klusmeier's *Walls that Divide* for personal devotions or in formulating a responsive prayer for use in worship.

"Walls that Divide"

Tho' ancient walls may still stand proud and racial strife be fact,
tho' bound'ries may be lines of hate, proclaim God's saving act!

Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty!

When vested pow'r stands firm entrenched and breaks another's back,
when waste and want live side by side, it's gospel that we lack!

Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty

The truth we seek in varied scheme, the life that we pursue,
unites us in a common quest for self and world made new!

Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty

The church divided seeks that grace, that newness we proclaim;
a unity of serving love that lives praise to God's name!

Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty

This broken world seeks lasting health and vital unity-
God's people in the Christ made new cast off all slavery!

Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty

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Available as "Though Ancient Walls" (#691) in Voices United, the hymnal of the United Church of Canada (tune name: KARR) URL: <http://www.united-church.ca/voicesunited/>