

THE WALL  
[written in oral form]

The sermon title is "The wall."  
This is not about Pink Floyd's song "The Wall."  
It has more in common with Humpty Dumpty.  
    Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
    Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.  
    All the king's horses and all the king's men  
    Couldn't put Humpty together again

A silly little nursery rhyme ....or does it have a deeper lesson?

Such as, sitting on a wall is a precarious place to be, and no one can stay there long. Moreover, when you do fall, you will have the painful awareness that you've ended up on one side or the other, separated and divided from those on the other side.

Walls divide, and there are no spectators, for long.

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Walls are monuments of human failure.  
They are the dismal shrine to fear, ignorance, greed and hate.

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Walls have been around for a long time.  
Walls have been built around houses, towns, and along the entire border of countries.

Walls seem to be very effective. A wall can either or both – keep things out and keep things in. The Romans built “Hadrian’s Wall” in England to keep the Celts out. And, the Soviets built the Berlin wall to keep the East Germans in, even though they said it was to keep decadence out.

*Maybe, it was for both reasons?*

The Americans are building a wall along their border with Mexico. They say it is to keep the Mexicans out. President-elect Trump wants to have a wall for the entire 2,000 mile border. Much of that border is a river, and he may not realize that over 600 miles of the wall is already finished.

Israel is also building a controversial WALL to separate them from the Palestinians – on Palestinian land. The town of Bethlehem is isolated behind that wall. So far, that bleak, concrete testament of apartheid is already 400 miles long.

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Walls seem to be everywhere. True, we no longer circle our cities with them, but we do encircle “elite / gated communities” with very physical walls with guards to secure them, too. And, many cities use obstacles, such as rivers, railroad tracks or highways to “wall” out the poorer neighbourhoods. And, sometimes, the “Wall” is not of brick and mortar. The “glass ceiling” that keeps women and minorities out of the upper echelons of achievement is a wall.

Stereotyping is also a wall.

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In addition, there are occasions, when churches, *I'm sure by accident*, build walls – walls of intolerance, of pietistic elitism and arrogance.

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There is another kind of wall. An intangible, yet very visible wall, and this wall is the personal walls we build.

Most of us have our walls to keep things and people out..... or... to keep and protect ourselves from being vulnerable and exposed.  
And, I think the community / national walls are a collective reflection of the personal walls that the citizens already have constructed.

Sadly, we humans build walls, and we are convinced that walls are effective at keeping bad things out or keeping good things in.

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The problem with walls ... is... that it keeps things out and it keeps things in,..... including wisdom, our neighbours and God.

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Walls divide, separate and isolate.  
**Walls are petrified fear.**

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Faithful to Jesus' life and message of dismantling walls, Paul, in Romans 15, encourages us to live in harmony with one another and to welcome one another, .... asserting **that** is the way to joy and peace. That is the way of God's heart.

*Hiding behind walls makes it rather challenging to live in harmony, to be loving and inclusive.*

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As we know, Jesus freely moved from Jew to Gentile area, through rich and poor, past weak and powerful, and back again...without regard to barriers or religious protocol walls.  
Jesus modeled "open range" living and being.  
He was living out the open range image presented in Isaiah 11.

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The Isaiah passage begins with the revelation that hope is about to spring forth from what was once cut down,..... and this hope, ....this person will be imbued with God's spirit.  
This "**saviour**" will have the spirit of wisdom, compassion, discernment, reverence of all that is God, .... and this person will be powerful.

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He will not prejudge with eyes and ears. There will be no walls of racism and bigotry.

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Righteousness and justice will be his guide.  
So, those who exploit, segregate and debase with wickedness and selfishness, would be wise to heed this message:  
Open, compassionate JUSTICE IS GOD'S WAY.

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In verse six, we are given the image of what God's domain / God's way looks like.

It is a realm without walls / without separation. There is freedom, and there is true justice. The prey and predator will “amazingly” live together; no walls will separate them. The presumed powerful will have no advantage.

Giant beasts will be lead by a little child.

The weak and innocent will not fear from what strikes from cover like a snake.

And, people will cease hurting and destroying God’s creation. War will be no more, and we will live in harmony with the land.

ALL of this will be on God’s holy mountain / God’s place / God’s domain..... where all is visible,... where there are no walls, and there is justice. Isaiah presents God’s ideal / God’s will..... of how this “saviour” will govern,..... and more importantly, this is The Way to **aspire to be**. That is, **if... we are** seekers of God’s will and if we value joy and freedom.

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This passage gives us a glimpse of God's heart,...and so does Matthew 25. Read them frequently!

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Unfortunately and surprisingly, the church is doing a poor job of being/ walking this way.

Too frequently, we experience huge walls in the Religious domain, and they are walls that judge and separate. We separate by saying some are better than others. Emphasising the division between “Saved” and Lost or right and wrong is adding stones to these walls. We all need God’s grace, and claiming special status devalues grace.

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Some are reinforcing the wall that divides Christian from Muslim, and rebuilding the moving wall that screens based on skin pigmentation.

To be sure, walls block vision, insight, awareness and the pursuit of truth. Both sides become blinded and self-righteous. Each claim to be the good guys and the other side are the bad guys. Each defend their cause/their religion,.....and war becomes easier to ignite. ....All because of walls. ....all because we let our fears take shape.

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It's Advent. I would much rather preach a nice uplifting Christmassy sermon..... perhaps with a little elf that moves about.

Nevertheless,..... it IS Advent. This is the season to prepare.

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Recent political events have given us reason to fear.

I dare say, there are some Canadians that think a wall on our Southern Border may not be a bad idea.

We do not know the future, but current indicators are not encouraging. A new leader is fanning the flames of racism, bigotry, misogyny and greed. This trend is not limited to the U.S.

Moreover, patriotic nationalism is the mortar. Fear and ignorance are the bricks. And, this shameful, destructive influence will likely effect us in many ways,.....including empowering the same here. We do Need to prepare!

Therefore, we must hold tightly to God's way.  
We must model the way of Christ.

We must be loving and proclaim open range living. And, take note: resistance / transformation begins with each one of us.

We must avoid stereotyping, and that includes our regard towards people who are different than us. We can't prejudge people,...even in our own thoughts.

We need to be mindful of the common separations, too.

Such as, let's never again say, Women sing this verse and men that verse. It's bass, alto, tenor and soprano.

Words matter, and gender separation is just that--separation.

Isaiah's image is all creatures together.

Physical appearance, economic status, education and sexual orientation must NOT affect our harmony. Those days / those ways are gone.....because they were destructive.

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If we are striving to walk/live in the way of God's heart, then

We Do NOT build walls!

We tear them down. We make them disappear!

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The pragmatist may assert that Isaiah's image is not realistic, that harmony is an illusion and that it's all just lofty thinking.

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Yes,.....it is lofty thinking. God's way is a higher / better way.

We can hide behind walls.....or...we can tap into God's wisdom.

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Yet,.....there may be a significant barrier to overcome,....and it is our own personal wall made of past hurts, fears and shame.

Most of us have a wall for self protection,....and all walls enclose, separate and cast shadows.

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We did not read the Matthew text for today. It is about John the Baptist calling people to repent.

Repenting is the way to tear down our own walls.

Repenting is confessing all the bricks of selfishness, all the stones of fears and anger that form **our walls**.

**Our wall** is what separates us from God and each other, and we built it thinking we can protect ourselves and our things.

Repentance invites God in,..... to help remove that wall.

And, how does this happen? .... How does God do it, .... because our walls are pretty stout? How does God tear them down? ??????????

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The answer springs forth in Advent, like a sprout from a stump.

Advent prepares us to grasp the story of God coming to the world, God coming to our heart.....as a child.

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God, gently tip toeing to us in the form of a child is a beautiful image.

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We celebrate this redeemer of the world / the new leader that Isaiah proclaims coming to the world as a child.

But, don't be deceived. It is the power of a child that will tear down our walls and show us the way.

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When Katherine was around two years old, I would occasionally take her with me when I visited at a nursery home.

There would be a number of people in the hall waiting to be wheeled to lunch or some other activity. Normally, most of them would not even look at me, let alone, break their sullen expression, .... Yet when they saw Katherine they beamed. Both men and women reached out to her and greeted her.

That is powerful. **A child is powerful**, ...for a child touches our child within and that is powerful!

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A child will lead mighty beasts....away.

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Moreover, a child invites us to be as a child, and beckons us to recall a time of freedom....., when we did not know walls – when we were a child.

In a world of love, a child knows innocence, safety, joy and peace!

A parent can “carefully” place a young child on a kitchen counter, and say “jump,” ..... and the child will look into the parent’s eyes and leap with the full faith that he/she will be safely caught. And, then there are hugs of affirmation, and there is laughter and joy.

A Good paradigm: a child leaping into her/his parent’s arms is How We Live Our Salvation,..... and experience harmony, joy and peace.

BUT, ... leaping requires Loving arms, and our world is armed, but short on love.

And, that is what we are called to do and be – to Love, to Share God’s love!

We do grace.

We catch those who are falling.

We bring healing and hope to the fallen.

With love and grace we make walls disappear, and...

we leap.....because we can't stay where we are any longer.