

Pentecost 9B

August 2, 2009

Hymns: 531 - (360 in place Psalm) - 569 - 536 - 515 v4-5

**EPHESIANS 2:13-22**  
**GOD TEARS DOWN WALLS**

**\*The Wall Of Sin Between Us and Him.**

**\*The Walls That Separate People From One Another.**

May the God of peace, Who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will. Amen.

Dear Brooklyn Lutheran members and guests – Black and White, European and African – members of one holy body in Christ, through faith in the cross:

**(slide 1)** On June 12, 1987 former President Ronald Reagan spoke in front of the Brandenburg Gate at the Berlin Wall. In his speech he issued a direct challenge to Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union. Here are the best-known words from that speech: ***“General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”*** Twenty-nine months later Mikhail Gorbachev did allow Berliners to destroy that wall, and soon after the Soviet Union collapsed. Tear down this wall! Since that time our WELS has been doing mission work in Russia and other parts of the former USSR and its satellite countries in Eastern Europe. Thank God that those walls came down! The wall separating and segregating the people of Communist East Europe from the Free World came down! Even more importantly, the wall of sin between many a Russian and God has also come down!

Long before the Berlin Wall was conceived, there was another famous wall—**(slide 2)** the Great Wall of China. This wall was actually begun 500 years before the birth of Christ and parts of it still stand. It was built and rebuilt over a time span of 1100 years in order to keep out armies from the north. Building a wall of this length and magnitude, scaling even high mountain elevations and deep ravines was an undertaking unparalleled in human history. The Great Wall of China was once guarded by more than one million men. It has been estimated that somewhere in the range of 2 to 3 million Chinese died building the wall. Since persons who died while working on it were buried beneath it, the Great Wall has been termed “the largest graveyard in the world.” But it did its part. It gave the Chinese a measure of security. Would a costly fence or wall along our U.S. border with Mexico give us Americans a measure of security?

Virtually all unbelievers in the world today don’t mind that there is a wall between themselves and God. For them it is a sad security blanket from God. The Scriptures show us that humans have a natural hostility toward God. They want neither anything to do with God or with the love that He extends in the free salvation of the cross. Some go so far as to even deny that there is a god. Others think that hiding behind their wall of hostility, that God can’t see them. Most people are in denial that they are so bad that they, like everyone else, deserve to spend eternity in hell. Many think that their works protect them from the wrath that is waiting to burst through that wall on the Last Day, when a righteous and holy God will destroy all those who remain His enemies.

In our text, Paul first and foremost is referring to that wall that separates humanity and God. His words in Ephesians are not easy for us to relate to, but listen closely to the rest of this paragraph, ***“[Christ’s] purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”*** That is not an easy passage to follow, but here is what Paul is saying to us: **Christ came to bring reconciliation.**

Be careful when you build a wall. Walls can destroy as well as protect. Surrender to God daily in prayer asking for grace in His forgiving love. Don't allow a wall of sin to stand one single day between you and the Almighty! Unrepented sin makes for a wall that separates and endangers one now and eternally. For this reason Christians will guard their own lives. For this reason, Christians will reach out in love to unrepentant sinners - both fallen fellow Christians and hardened heathen. It's not the Christian thing to allow walls to stand unchallenged either between oneself and God, or between oneself and another person.

**(slide 3)** A pastor was asked to be with a man's family at the hospital while the man had cancer surgery. Tom Field had raised three girls, then divorced. Later he married Betty. Betty loved Tom and was a good wife to him. Tom's three grown daughters had refused to recognize Betty as their father's wife for years. That day when the pastor entered the hospital room, the spirit of bitterness and tension was so real, it could not be ignored. The pastor greeted everyone and then Tom asked him to pray. The pastor prayed a prayer that day that he had never prayed before, nor since. He remembers it plainly. In his prayer he said this: *"Dear Lord, You know the need that Tom has as he faces this surgery for this cancer. But, Lord, before we ask You to do anything for Tom physically, I pray You will deal with the cancer of bitterness that has destroyed this family for years."* When he closed his prayer and looked up, everyone in the room was crying and those three daughters moved across the room and for the first time hugged Betty and asked for forgiveness. Be careful when you build a wall. Walls destroy as well as protect.

St. Paul knew about walls. In our lesson today from Ephesians he writes that Christ has broken down "the wall of hostility." He writes, **(slide 4)** *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . ."* On the mind of Paul and his readers was a wall that stood in the temple at Jerusalem. The wall was about 3 or 4 feet high. It ran through the court of the temple. The purpose of the wall was to keep Gentiles from entering the inner court, into which only Jewish men were permitted. There was a sign which warned anyone who wasn't a Jew that entering this area was punishable by death. God had set the Jewish nation apart as the people through whom He would send the Savior of the whole world. Non-Jews such as the Ethiopian to whom Philip witnessed after Jesus' ascension, were welcomed to saving faith by the God of all nations. On the day of Pentecost there were people from all over the known world - Jews and Gentiles alike - worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem. But the Lord had called for the maintenance of distinction between Jew and Gentile until the time of Christ.

The wall in the temple served this purpose in a way. But in the eyes of haughty Jews it became a wall of discrimination. Paul calls it a wall of hostility. That's because it made for hard feelings both ways, bad blood between even Jewish and Gentile believers. In the year 1871, archaeologists, digging around the temple site in Jerusalem, actually uncovered the very stone that marked the wall with this warning. These were the actual words, translated from both the Hebrew and the Greek: *"No man of another race is to proceed within the partition and enclosing wall about the sanctuary. Any one arrested there will have himself to blame for the penalty of death which will be imposed as a consequence."* People are still building walls of hostility. Christ says to us, "Tear down this wall!"

Christ came to reconcile us to one another, as well as to God. Doesn't it amaze you that two thousand years after the coming of Christ into the world, the world should still be filled with so much hate, so much hostility? A US pilot in Vietnam, tells of his experience in that terrible conflict. He told of bearing down on a Vietnamese village to drop his bombs. As he pushed through the clouds, he caught a glimpse of a church. The man said: **(slide 5)** *"It must have been Sunday because I could see a crowd of people entering the church in the village. It was only a glimpse, but I could see it clearly. They were Christians! Nobody ever told me that Viet Nam was a Christian country," he said. "It could have been my hometown, my Catholic church. They looked just like me. They worshiped the same way we worshiped. Nobody told me."*

Jews, Gentiles, whatever - Christians are part of one body in Christ. Love for God, love for His truth, love for our own souls' welfare, love for the soul of our neighbor make us intolerant of heresy. We will not compromise the truth we find in God's Word, the Bible. As strange as it seems, it was God in love Who

called for and kept up the distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Old Testament times. It was part of divine wisdom in connection with the promise God had made to Abraham.

Still, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God . . .” (Mt. 5:9).*** Christ came to bring peace between us sinners and our God. Christ also came to reconcile us humans to one another. With the advent of global terrorism hanging over us, is there any earthly problem of greater importance?! But how shall we be reconciled to one another without first being reconciled to God? And how are we reconciled with God? St. Paul says it is by the cross of Jesus Christ. Fellow Christian, you have the answer to the nuclear bomb and Muslim terrorism. It is the cross of Christ! Share the Gospel. Live it out in your own life and in relations with others – Christians and non-Christians!

Have you heard about laminin--l-a-m-i-n-i-n? **(Slide 6)** What is laminin? Here is the explanation of what is one of latest scientific breakthroughs: ***“Laminins are a family of proteins that are an integral part of the structural scaffolding of basement membranes in almost every animal tissue.”*** Did you get that? In plain language, laminins are what hold us together . . . literally. They are cell adhesion molecules. They are what hold one cell of our bodies to the next cell. Without them, we would literally fall apart. How inconceivably big our God is! . . . He spoke the universe into being! . . . He breathes stars out of His mouth! This star-breathing, universe-creating God also knitted our human bodies together with amazing detail and wonder.

We can trust that the God Who created all this, also has the power to hold it all together when things seem to be falling apart. Our loving Creator is also our Sustainer through the rough times. Laminin! These cell adhesion molecules hold us together. By now have you noticed what laminin looks like? **(slide 7)** The structure of laminin is the same as the structure of a cross. So, the glue that holds us together, all of us . . . is in the shape of a cross. It’s a powerful metaphor of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Through the cross He holds it all together.

Tear down this wall! Christ has come into the world to reconcile us to God and to one another. Open your heart this day to the One who truly holds it all together. And then open your heart to your fellow man. Amen.

***Gentiles - you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people (the Jews) and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Amen.***