

Epiphany 4C 2010
Luke 4:21-30, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Sermon for Advent LC
January 31st, 2010

“The Walls Must Come Down”

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and the one who defines love, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I was gone for part of this week as most of you are aware as I traveled to San Diego for a gathering of Mission Developers and others who are doing the work of starting new churches throughout the ELCA. I look forward to sharing some of what I learned and pictures down the road at our adult education class but for today I want to rather talk a little bit about the things I thought about as I traveled, talked with others and journeyed into Mexico across the Tijuana border. I will forever remember the image of the giant wall that is being built along that border– a sign of fear and the reality of our world, a sign that we want to keep some people out while we keep others in, a sign that humanity is not just– that our sinfulness leads us to feel that we need such walls to feel secure. Now whether or not the wall is a good idea is not the point here today– but what struck me was this image of this wall separating people from one another, separating the body of Christ from one another for if we believe what I preached last week– all children of God are part of the body– so this wall in Mexico separates that body– and I stared at it, and then beyond it at the field and the helicopters patrolling the way, and downtown San Diego in the distance I broke down– not because of the political right or wrongness of it, not just because of the stories of the thousands who have died trying to cross it but because that wall to me represents the human struggle– keeping those out that just want a chance, keeping people away because they are different and we are not sure about them and if they are okay. But the reason the tears began to form and the broken heart will never leave me is because I realized I did not have to go to Mexico to see a wall– that wall exists in Michigan, in the Traverse City area, in Lake Ann and even in Advent and most definitely in my own life and that made me sad and upset. Walls of division– that keep some out because they are different is the reality of our world and most of those walls are not miles long and many feet high but are silent and invisible but just as divisive. Yet the call of our Lord is for us the church to break down those walls with the love that Christ first gave us. And thought that is a big call– it is our call.

I wonder friends, who are the people that you keep out and why– what are the walls that you build to make you feel safe? That is a hard question and I don't like thinking about it anymore than you do. But if we look at who Jesus is and we read the Bible in a way that is honest we have to ask that question, we have to be concerned with who we are keeping out and we have to try to work through that. Now I am not saying that we have to go out and give everybody a hug but what I am saying is that we need to be honest with our own wall building and follow the example of Christ in his life and what he says in the Gospel this morning. When Jesus continues to teach about his true message they get a bit nervous. Jesus tells them that this message is not just for them and their type, but for all people– even the outsiders of their culture. They become jealous and filled with rage– how can this man, the son of one of our Own be doing all

these things to other people but forget about us- we want him to rule here, with us. You see in that culture it was the status quo that one would care for himself and his own kind only- note the doctor cure yourself quote by Christ. But Jesus makes it clear that his love, and his purpose is for the other, for everyone. He then references the work of Elijah and Elisha and how they healed not the chosen ones, but the outsider. This drives the people mad, and they force Jesus out. Jesus again forces us to ponder God's love- isn't God's love for all? And in forcing us there Jesus makes us consider what then is the purpose of the Church? We have to be honest- we keep some people out and we convince ourselves that is okay, the norm- but Jesus says the heck with that- the norm of my love is to embrace and care for everyone and to live for that person you can't stand. Love the enemy, love the one that is different, love the one that makes you sick. I don't that like that- I'd rather just hear Jesus loves me and move on.

The reality is this- we will continue to fail at this call- we will miss the mark- and most importantly you need to know that Jesus loves you in spite of your brokenness and Jesus promises to be with you when you are weak and make you strong, to fill you when you are dry. But now that we have covered that let's dig a little more. As I listen to this world, listen to folks in our community, and as I live my own life I see us- me included push people outside our walls- we push people out that look different than us, that talk a different language- they become the butt of our jokes- I am guilty as the next guy but this is the reality I see- we keep pushing people away because they act differently than us, because they are addicts, or they are the abuser, we push people aside because we are sure that they are wrong and we are right, we push people aside and fail to love them because they scare us or they have hurt us or have simply done nothing but be different. And maybe you are the one who has been cast aside- you are the one who has felt unwelcome- to you I say cling to the words of Paul that describe the love of God and what the church of Christ is supposed to be. Those same words which must convict us who are guilty also provide hope for you who are abandoned and oppressed. Paul says to us the ones you keep out...they are the body you are to love them and love is this...patient, kind, not rude or arrogant- it bears all things and endures all things. Love never ends Paul says but boy oh boy do we end it. Friends I hope you took the dare last week to seek God's guidance in a new way and to be led differently seriously and I hope that you begin today to notice the walls in your own life and with Christ begin to break them down and truly love the one that you can't imagine loving. For we are the body...and so are they.

God loves you and so do I. Amen.

