

Tear Down the Wall
John 14:8-17, 25-26

Last November the world celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1961 the Communists began building the wall to separate West Berlin from East Berlin. It stood for 28 years. For 28 years neighbors and even families were separated by the Berlin Wall. On November 9, 1989, the announcement was made that the gates to the Berlin Wall would be opened for anyone to cross. Immediately thousands of people gathered at the gates to squeeze through to the other side to greet family and friends they had not seen in decades. There was a great celebration. In fact, the whole world celebrated. We all knew this was an historic event.

When walls separate people, you can't help but celebrate when they come down. And that's what happened on Pentecost. There was a wall separating heaven and earth. God longed to be with God's children. And humanity hungered for God. We needed God, and God wanted us. But when Adam sinned, a wall was placed between us.

Who built that wall? Well, God and humans both built the wall.

Why? Some say the wall was built to protect the holiness of God from being stained by our sin. They look to the Holy of Holies in the old Temple. The Holy of Holies was a room at the front of the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence was placed. There was a curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the worshippers. This curtain prevented the worshippers from entering into God's presence. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year after going through all kinds of rites of purification, to remove the stain of sin. The curtain represents the wall between heaven and earth.

This explanation does bother me. It doesn't sound like the God I know. It reminds me of a time I was at a home to pick up a man who was going to a very special event. He was dressed in a white tuxedo. He was resplendent. As he was preparing to leave, his little daughter came into the room. She had obviously been eating a chocolate bar, and she wanted to give her father a big hug. He ran out of the room and closed the door behind him. The look of the little girl's face was heartbreaking. I can't imagine God doing that. God cares far more about us than about white robes. They can be cleaned. Hearts broken by rejection sometimes never heal.

I do think God built the wall that keeps us out of God's presence. But I think that wall is there to protect us from God, rather than protecting God from us. You remember Isaiah's response when he found himself in the presence of God. He fell on his face and said, "Woe is me. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I have seen the Lord." That's the way all the saints of the Bible reacted when they found themselves in God's presence. They were overwhelmed with the sense of their unworthiness in the presence of God's righteousness and holiness. When they saw what true goodness was, they were so aware of how far short they fell that they felt they were not worthy of life itself. They wanted to die.

God put that wall in place to protect us from this trauma. And God left that wall in place until a remedy was created.

God has taken care of that. When Christ offered up his life for us on the cross, he became the sacrifice for our sins. His blood covers our guilt. We can enter into God's presence without fear because we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

When Christ died, the curtain in the Temple was torn open by a mighty wind. God opened a door in that wall. God invited us into God's presence.

But the wall is still there. What's going on? Well, let me explain by telling a story. When I was a kid we had a school outing that involved staying in a hotel. Some of my buddies and I had a room, and some of our other friends at the room next door. When we went in our room, we discovered there was a door from our room into their room. Of course, we decided it would be great fun to throw open the door and run into their room and ambush them. But the door was locked. We worked and worked and finally got all the locks unlocked. We gathered around the door, all ready to rush through the door. One of the guys turned the knob and threw the door back, and we ran into another door. Turns out both rooms had a door, and they both had to be opened to be able to get in.

That's true with this wall between heaven and earth too. God has opened the door to us. But we have to open the door to God.

The truth is that we had more to do with putting this wall up than God did. When Adam sinned, God came down in the evening to walk with him, just as before. But Adam hid from God. God didn't turn away from Adam. It was Adam who ran from God. And we've been running from God ever since.

We keep our door closed to God. We keep our door closed to God for all kinds of reasons. Some close the door to God because of their shame and our guilt. We are not proud of some of the things we have done, or some of the things we think, or some of the things we feel. We don't want to let God see us as we really are, which is strange because God knows us better than we know ourselves. Some haven't heard the good news that their guilt is covered by the blood of Christ and that God has accepted us and loved us just as we are. So, they keep the door closed to God.

Some keep our door closed to God because of their pride. They are still repeating Adam's sin. They want to be God. If they can't be the God of all creation, at least they want to be the God of their lives. And they know there's not enough room in our lives for two gods. If we let God in, we have to give up being God. They are not ready to give up trying to be god, so they keep the door closed to God.

Some keep the door closed to God because they are afraid that if they let God into their lives they will have to give some things up. They are holding on to some vices, some old angers, some relationships, that they are just not ready to let go of. What they don't understand is that God doesn't take anything away from us. They will give these things up—not because God takes them away, but because God gives us something far better. They will give them up because they don't need them anymore.

God had thrown open the door that keeps us from entering heaven. So, why aren't we all enjoying fellowship with God? Because we haven't opened the door to let God in. In the letter to the Laodiceans in the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me." The only thing that keeps the wall between heaven and earth intact is us. God has opened heaven's door to earth. We have to open our door to heaven.

On Pentecost, some people did just that. They opened the door to God. They were willing to let God be God in their lives. They entrusted their lives to Christ. They were open to whatever God chose to do with them and in them. They trusted Christ so much that they were willing to come out of hiding and be with God.

So, the Holy Spirit was freed to come to them. Just like the first crack in the Berlin Wall, this was the first break in the wall that separated heaven and earth.

Pentecost was only the first crack in the wall. Each time we open our hearts to receive the Spirit of God, we open another gap in the wall, and we bring the day closer when it is completely overthrown.

If you have not done it yet, invite the Spirit to come to you. Don't be afraid. It is the Spirit of grace and love, who comes to bring strength, guidance and truth to us.

If you have already entered into fellowship with the Spirit of Christ, invite God's presence into every area of your lives. The truth is that we all have doors into some parts of our lives that we have not opened to Christ. We want the goodness, love and truth of God to fill every portion of our lives, so that heaven and earth are fully united in us.

Someday heaven and earth will be united. The physical world and the spiritual world will be one. That was what God intended from the beginning of creation.

The end of the Book of Revelation tells us that eventually this wall will be completely dismantled. John foresaw that great event and described what he saw, "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.'"

We don't know when that will happen. But we don't have to wait. Each of us can tear down the wall separating us from God by inviting Christ to be the Lord of our life. Christ has opened the door to us. Now we only have to open the door to him. Christ has promised that if we open the door, the Holy Spirit will come to each of us: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

The day of Pentecost was the first break in the wall. It was not the one and only break. Pentecost happens over and over again. It can happen to us again and again. We only have to keep opening doors to Christ.

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