

Sunday 21st July 2024; Trinity 8. Benefice Holy
Communion Gilling

Some words from today's Epistle, *“For he is our peace; in his flesh he (has made both groups into one and) has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”*

What we have before us this morning is a passage of scripture that beautifully describes Jesus' ability to take people who are hostile and divided and bring them together into one family. It's the ultimate picture of reconciliation. It's the supreme image of racial, social, and economic justice. If verses 1-10 are a description of the power of Christ to redeem us and save us individually, then verses 11-22 reveal how Jesus brings about unity among diversity in this new body called the church - a community where all prior distinctions of race, gender, religion, and social status are done away with. Jesus destroys the hostility and enmity which exists between people everywhere and by the cross He creates a new kind of people who are in a new relationship with one another, the church. This means that those of us who call ourselves Christians, Jesus-followers, believers in Christ need to be reminded that there's a world outside these walls that is yearning for unity, that is longing to see and know that it's possible to be a family under one roof, to be a community of people united in purpose and passion.

Sadly, you don't have to go too far to discover walls of hostility that divide people. Conflict is one of the spaces in which we live as human beings. It is true at the global level where nations are constantly clashing against nation and political, economic, and social divisions and injustice is everywhere, internationally, and locally.

What about you personally? What conflict are you experiencing in your life right now. Imagine it as a brick

wall that is built between you and that person or group or situation. Have you built a wall? Each of those bricks are moments in time; they are actions taken, words spoken, love withheld; a bitter word, a hateful comment, a cold shoulder. Brick after brick is laid down until the wall is so high and so thick that it seems impossible to change with the result that you have bricked yourself in.

The biggest wall of hostility is the wall we build between us and God. How many times have we hurt God by our pettiness, and anger, and lying, and cheating? If anyone had the right to build a wall between us it would be God. But God looks at you and I and says, *“I have died to the wall. I have died to your sin and the many times you have hurt me and others. I forgive you, and I love you.”* As he looks at us with that eternal love, all the bricks vanish. So, what about your wall today? Look at each of those bricks made of those hurtful things. Once we were defined by them, but now, because of God’s love demonstrated in Jesus, and through the power of God’s Spirit moving between us, we can let go of the past, remove the bricks, and work toward the future of peace in the presence of God where instead of building walls, we build loving relationships.

I would like to end today with a personal tribute to someone who was a friend to me when I was taking steps to seek selection for ministry in 2012. His name was Bishop Tony Palmer and ten years ago yesterday he was killed while out on his motorcycle by a drunk driver on the wrong side of the road. Tony devoted his life to bringing breaking down walls of hostility between opposing groups of believers, especially Roman Catholics and evangelical protestants. He was Anglican but his spiritual director was Pope Francis. He worked tirelessly to fulfil the prayer of Jesus that his followers would be “one”. His slogan for this were the words, “Luther’s protest is over, is yours?”

For Tony everything came down to relationships and breaking down the walls we create with one another, and with God, as he said, *“People are God’s conduits through which He releases His blessings to us. He blesses us but uses people to do it. This means that respecting, nurturing, and investing in right relationships, is as important as our prayers themselves. Relationships are sacred.”*

Thanks be to God. Amen.