



July 27: The Kingdom of God: And Let it Begin with Us | Ephesians 2:14-16

Christ proclaims peace. Christ brings peace. And Christ sacrificed all for peace. More than that, Christ himself is our peace.

In Ephesians chapter 2, Paul makes this radical claim—not just that Christ *preached*, taught, or values peace but that Jesus *embodies* peace.

Peace is now more than a principle or idea; it has taken on flesh. Peace has a face and a name that is above all other names - Jesus.

The very first words out of the risen Christ's mouth were, "Peace be with you."

Not condemnation, not explanation—**peace**. That's what the disciples needed in their obstacles in knowing peace...in the face of their fear and confusion. We face similar obstacles and our need is the same...peace.

Our centering word from Ephesians 2:14, "**For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility**" His goal? To tear down the wall that separated the two and make into one, one new humanity, "**...thus making peace**".

Jesus wants us to have peace.

And yet... as we explored last week, peace still feels elusive in our world. We are steeped and surrounded by violence, hostility, and division—internationally, nationally, in state, in our communities, and even in our own homes and our own hearts.

Making peace feel out of reach.

In our final Sunday in **Overcoming Obstacles to Peace**, how do we overcome obstacles to the peace Jesus offers?

How do we tear down walls—both walls built by others and the ones we've built ourselves to experiencing the peace Jesus wants everyone to have?

Because that is our work as peacemakers. Tearing down walls is part of the hard and holy work of peacemaking. And it must begin with us.

We cannot wait for someone else to apologize first, reach out first, or change first. The walls come down when *we* subversively, quietly, start chipping away at them from our side to bring them down.

Some moments in history do not fade, and the following words spoken on that day still ring true and clear in my memory. Please watch our screen for a minute.

Remember that day in history?

Tear down this wall!

Former President Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin on June 12, 1987, and delivered that unforgettable challenge to Gorbachev. And on November 9, 1989 that wall came down! A wall that symbolized division, hostility, and fear crumbled!

But it didn't happen overnight. It was a process: transit restrictions were lifted in East Berlin, as more and more people chipped and picked and created breaches in that physical wall on the East side, but the full demolition came 2 years and 5 months later.

That movement for peace didn't begin with a sledgehammer—though Reagan's words certainly hit hard and left a mark on history. Mostly, though, that peace...most lasting peace comes slowly, quietly—through patient, persistent contributions, one person at a time, over years.

I was vaguely aware of this world event, grateful but not fully understanding. Until two or three years later, when I found myself in Aspen, Colorado on a mission project.

That summer, Aspen had the foresight and conviction to ship over part of the Berlin Wall to be displayed in their town.

One day later that summer, I found myself downtown Aspen, standing before a section of that Wall. I was transfixed. So much pain had been inflicted by that wall. I touched it. I even picked up and hefted a piece of the wall that had broken off.

I didn't fully understand what I was experiencing.

Maybe I wanted to feel the weight of history, to touch such redemption in my lifetime, to believe in the power of peace to overcome.

I still carry that day in my heart, unsure if it's my own voice I hear or the Spirit of God still urging me, **“Seek peace and pursue it.”**

That wall was proof that peace can overcome great obstacles. Now it wasn't just a far-off country's longing for peace, it wasn't just a town's quiet witness for peace to be in every heart, it was now another heart won over to peace.

I had forgotten that day. But now I see how God had been planting and tending seeds of peace into my life. Learning that peace takes time to grow.

I believe most hearts long for peace. We may disagree on how to get there, which walls to tackle first. We know we've built walls in our hearts, relationships, families, in our church and communities. But that deep yearning is universal.

And as Minnesotans, we are practiced at pretending no walls exist. We are a little conflict avoidant, we stay "Minnesota nice", smiling through tension.

But I know we have had some heated conversations with our neighbors during Covid, with a relative at Thanksgiving while growing up...for me that would be Uncle Mike, or even here in church?

Certainly, it makes us long for simpler times, to long for how things used to be. I long for that at times too. We might find ourselves saying to ourselves, **"Why can't we just go back to the way things were?"**

But we can't go back, for many reasons.

Because so much has changed. It doesn't feel like we are even in the same world, or in the same denomination, or even the same church that we used to be. Right?

We can't go back. God only calls us forward...and today, into taking down barriers and removing obstacles to peace.

So, then what would it be like if we were to name our walls and then chip away at them. Chipping away through prayer, through kindness and being engaged, present, and positive?

And let's wonder together about Jesus—who is our peace—does the Lord have a seat at our kitchen tables, school board meetings, fellowship hall, a seat next to our own comfy chairs in our living rooms?

Are we inviting him not just to proclaim peace, but to guide us in how we pursue it, and to keep seeking and pursuing until there is a breakthrough, a crumbling, and a crash?

Without the whole of the Biblical witness to peace, I wouldn't be giving peace a second thought. Not with recent headlines, not with the way the world works.

But Scripture doesn't let peace go. From my favorite blessing from Numbers in the Old Testament, "The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace," to the angels singing "peace on earth," to Jesus saying "my peace I give you," to Paul calling Christ our peace—it's clear: God is relentlessly committed to peace.

And again, here is Paul's letter to the Ephesians, a powerful cosmic call to unity and peace in Christ. Helping me see it is a big theme for God, not optional in God's Kingdom.

Paul paints a stark picture of humanity's condition in the first 10 verses of chapter two: a **wall of division** separating Jews and Gentiles, and deeper still, a wall between **all people and God**.

We were **dead in our sins**—not just broken, but spiritually lifeless. We lived **without God, without hope, cut off** from His presence and promise.

Condemned to follow only the cravings of our flesh—**pleasure, pride, ego, and self**—we were trapped in a life driven by self-interest, far from the life God intended.

But now, we are in our text now, but now because of Christ, in Christ...all that has changed.

Meaning the very real wall, the biggest wall and strongest wall that ever existed in the history of walls, the wall blocking us from drawing near and relating and befriending and receiving life from a holy God has come down!

That wall has fallen with a crash!

So...uh, now what? What does that mean?

Walls no longer define us. We no longer fear them—*any* of them. As children of God, members of His household, we now hear and heed the call to join the wall-breaking revolution.

We align ourselves with the heart of God, a God who tears down every dividing wall. We partner in the work He cares most about, the work of reconciliation, justice, healing, and peace.

Because in Christ, we are now peacemakers. Bridge-builders. Wall-demolishers.

And now, in Him, **walls fear us**. Walls have been put on notice. *Walls... we're coming for you.*

Let's pull together and work on the walls that are here.

In this season of transition and changes in our church, could we possibly be dealing with a few walls?

How about walls made of the fear of change? Walls that want things to stay the same.

What if we trusted in the life God wants to bring us on the other side of that wall? What if we stayed open to new leaders, new teams, and new ministries.

Lord, send your provision of new staff. But they will lead differently?

How about dealing with walls of doubt and discouragement? Could we work on trusting God, trusting God is not done with us yet? To allow a little hope to bubble up inside of us as we seek to keep rebuilding and growing as a church?

How about chipping away at walls of lingering resentment, unforgiveness, favoritism, and ruffled feathers?

Bringing down those walls through forgiveness, releasing our need for control, and simply letting go. Trusting God that unity and peace is better than our personal agendas?

Can you identify a wall that may be here? Or a wall that is impacting your relationship with God? A wall of apathy, boredom, or withdrawal from God's work here?

BUMC, if you want to know peace, bring down these walls!

BUMC, if you want to continue to flourish in God, tear down these walls!

I believe there is work for us to do. And everyone is needed to do their work.

And in light of the greatest spiritual wall ever coming down, the wall that separated us from God, now in Christ, we can live in relationship with God.

And in light of the greatest political wall in my lifetime coming down — the Berlin Wall — I believe we can trust, we can have hope, that any walls that still stand between us and God and others, whether personal, political, or spiritual, can and will come down.

But we will have to want it.

We will have to work on it.

Let it begin with us.

As we patiently, persistently, and subversively keep chipping away until the walls come down.

Amen.

Time of Reflection:

1. What wall in your life—whether in a relationship, your heart, or within our church—might God be inviting you to start chipping away at today? Maybe just begin praying about it.
2. Or how can you invite Jesus, who is our peace, to sit with you—at your kitchen table, in your conversations, and in your decisions—as you seek to be a peacemaker in your corner of the world?