

[1 Samuel 8:4-11, \(12-15\), 16-20, \(11:14-15\)](#)

Psalm 138

[Mark 3:20-35](#)

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

“United we stand, divided we fall.”

What comes to mind with this phrase?

Football (soccer) teams?

Airlines?

Churchill?

Country music songs?

Race and reconciliation?

When I think about divisions, my mind often goes to the concrete,
And for me this means literally concrete walls.

Many of you may or may not know that growing up in the mid
80s, I lived in West Berlin, a walled city in the heart of East
Germany.

A space where you could only get so lost, because if you went too
far in the wrong direction, you would literally run into a wall.

The city was encapsulated by the effects of war and division,
dating well before I was born.

The divisions were political and also familial. Families were separated by a wall created by military powers exerting their strength against each other.

A wall meant to keep some within and others without.

Those living within the walls living within a system vastly different than the system outside the walls.

While those within the walls could go freely about the city as they chose there was also a sense of fear just beyond the wall restricting our movements and an ever-present reminder to us that we were unable leave the city without paper work and checkpoints, permissions and angst.

Divisions, created by earthly powers.

Divisions of family, senselessly by who was inside and who was outside.

A city divided and surrounded by a wall, complete with watchtowers, no man's land, and guard dogs.

I remember wondering about our neighbors who one day were able to travel to see family and then the next unable to even send word without worrying about if the letter will ever be received, much less seeing their loved ones again in their lifetime.¹

IN our Gospel reading today, division seems to be central theme of the moment.

The Scribes, the community, Jesus' family.

We are only in chapter three of the Gospel of Mark and Jesus did not waste time in stirring things up.

To catch us up, Mark (who never wastes time nor words) begins with Jesus' baptism by John, his 40 days in the wilderness and temptation, the calling of disciples, Jesus has taught and healed in various locations and those known and unknown, he has already made people uneasy with his statements and people are beginning to ask questions.

And last week, we hear he is starting to share how different God's plans are for God's people.

Restoration to wholeness, completeness, fullness.

Divisions are occurring in the here and now.

Scribes and Pharisees are feeling their authority being threatened and they are closing in with theories as to who Jesus really might be.

Disciples will begin to get anxious about all of this talk of death that is coming.

And today, there are actual walls up between Jesus' biological family and friends and those who are nearest to him.

Jesus addresses all of these divisions with words of firmness and invitation in his parable responses.

Jesus talks to the Scribes about how ridiculous their theory of his being of the devil really was. Their theory of that sort of power defeats their own theory.

As Jesus will tell his disciples later, he and God are one. Unified not divided. The authority can be no other authority and has been given to restore humanity to wholeness and oneness with God. There is no other way, division is not who God is.

God's will is in Restoring community, not dividing it.

Forgiveness is something that is both of God and unifies community. Forgiveness requires the Holy Spirit and hard work, recognizing that in building relationship there is vulnerability and desire for transformation, a new path.

A path that Jesus not only lives but is constantly redirecting those who will listen to hear- the scribes, the disciples, his family, and those who are the closest to him on this day where they are gathered.

To his family, who care for him deeply, but find themselves outside of the walls of the assembly on this day, Jesus says they too have to re-vision their identity. Not meaning they mean less to him, rather, he is speaking to those directly around him that they are just as important to him as those he has grown up with and to whom he has called personally as disciples.

Coming together and recognizing that community is found through unification of those around you destroys division and brings people together amidst walls and physical separation.

The Berlin Wall fell in November of 1989. While my family had moved from that space just 5 months earlier, the shock, awe, and joy was palpable through the television and through friends who were still living there.

Freedom was available for both sides of this one wall.
Families could visit freely.

And yet.

Reunification took time and the after effects were deeply felt and can still be seen today.

For a city and country that was divided for nearly 30 years, the inequity of housing, medical care, and wealth was deeply and painfully felt.

Tearing down the wall was just the beginning of the work that needed to be done for unification.

And while it was one step, it was a very important one.

And the hard work continues.

We live in a world of walls literally and metaphorically.

This past week we remembered the 80th anniversary of D-Day. We remembered the lives lost and the concerted effort to not only

remember – the desire to prevent wars such as those to happen again and yet...

We live in a world where war still rages in the Holy Land, in Ukraine, Sudan, and here in our own country there are communities that live in constant fear and angst.

Jesus, today, spoke boldly to those seeking community.
Scribes who wanted control and authority for the sake of power.
Family who wanted to belong and be close were invited to revision
who is family
And each of us, were invited into restored relationship as we stand
in need of forgiveness and healing.

Wherever you find yourself in this story,
as someone who is just trying to follow the rules that have been
handed down,
as someone who has been following Jesus all of your life and
wanting to be close,
to those who have heard about Jesus just recently and received
hope...
to the person who might have just seen the crazy masses and
wondered what is going on.

Jesus says to you, God is doing a new thing.
You have to open your hands to receive it.

You have to unclench your death grip on how you think you are to be

And lean into the transformation of what love can do, inviting you into community in a new way.

Inviting you to breath in deeply, be yourself, your true self.

The walls you have created around yourself or imposed on others will be torn down.

Community can come together, and work towards restoration of that beloved community of when Adam and Eve walked in the garden with God in the cool of the night.

United we stand, divided we fall²- regardless of what imagery comes to mind for you, Aseop³ is attributed to sharing this axiom for the first time in his fable the 4 oxen and the lion. In the fable the oxen were undefeated when they gathered tails together and their horns facing outward. The lion could not attack any of them because they together defended each other. When the oxen wandered out on their own, then the lion succeeded.

Coming together, in our brokenness is what the household of God does day in and day out. Daily striving to receive, be transformed, and share the love of God to those we encounter.

We will get lost and we will run into walls. My prayer is that we might, with grace and humility, always work together to be

vulnerable enough to seek a way to build up rather than divide and to seek and work towards forgiveness and restoration together.

Jesus, invites us closer, accepts us as we are, and welcomes us in to do this work together as companions in the household of God.

¹ For more information: <https://www.stiftung-berliner-mauer.de/en/topics/berlin-wall#building-the-wall-in-august-1961>

² Aesop Fable

³ Aesop's fable <https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/35/aesops-fables/392/the-four-oxen-and-the-lion/> and more interesting notes on Aesop <https://www.thecollector.com/who-was-aesop/>