
West Epping Uniting Church

UNITY SUNDAY

18th November 2018

Rev John Barr



Walls.

We build walls for a purpose. And that purpose is to keep people in and to keep others out. Walls are constructed to define things, to manage and to control. They can offer protection. but they can also be instruments of coercion and oppression.



The Berlin Wall was built from 1961 to divide the German city between east and west. Constructed by the German Democratic Republic, its purpose was to contain the people of East Berlin and to protect them from so-called “fascist” elements in the West. Its demolition officially began in 1960 and was finished by 1992.

(2)



This next wall was constructed by Israel as barrier cutting off the West Bank. Built from the year 2000, Israel considers this a security barrier against terrorism while the Palestinians call it a racial segregation or apartheid wall. The wall runs for 708 kilometers and is now a potent symbol of the divisions that exist between Israel and Palestine.



Next is a picture from the Demilitarized Zone that divides North and South Korea. This wall cuts the Korean peninsula roughly in half between the communist north and the capitalist south. Created in 1953 this high security zone represents ongoing tensions between the two states that has effectively imprisoned some 25 million North Koreans in abject poverty and brutal political oppression.



(3)

Our next image comes from Belfast in Northern Ireland. This is part of a series of separation barriers that cut off Republican Catholic neighbourhoods from predominantly Loyalist Protestant communities. The purpose of these barriers is to minimize inter-communal violence between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. Constructed in 1969 following extensive riots they were meant to last just six months. But these barriers still largely remain today.



This next wall exists on the Mexican-United States border and its purpose is to prevent people crossing from Mexico into the USA. At this stage the wall exists in bits and pieces extending some 930 kilometers. However, the current President has plans to extend this wall along most of the border with the purpose of stopping asylum seekers entering the country.

There are so many walls. And as some come down others go up.

I wonder what the world would look like without walls?

Well, walls are pretty much part of our everyday life. Just look at the suburbs of Sydney where there is an increasing tendency to live behind security fences and to take up residence in gated communities.



(4)

Walls even cut off the church. Here not everyone is welcome and, in the past, walls promoted a history of racial and social segregation.



But, what would a church with no walls look like?



This is a picture of Christ Church Anglican Cathedral in Darwin after Cyclone Tracy devastated the city on Christmas Eve 1974. It has no walls. But I don't think I would like to worship in a church like this!



Pictured above are the remains of an abbey in the south-west of England. Founded in the 7th century, Glastonbury Abbey became one of the most richest and powerful monasteries in all of England.

(5)

During the time of the English Reformation this all magnificence came to an end as King Henry 8th stripped the monastery of its power and wealth. The head abbot was hanged, drawn and quartered. The grand abbey was abandoned. I don't think this is the kind of church without walls that I would identify with.



Then in the late eighteenth century an Anglican priest by the name of John Wesley thought about a church with no walls as he left the confines of the sanctuary to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to ordinary working people in town squares and village thoroughfares. This was an effective move. It led to a revival of the church and the development of movement called Methodism. This is the kind of church that attracts me!



And here we have a contemporary out-door church that is no doubt part of a parish camp or congregational retreat. There are no walls here – just people. And this reminds me of a lovely song that speaks about the church. The words are as follows:

(6)

*The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people.*

*We're many kinds of people,
with many kinds of faces,
all colours and all ages, too
from all times and places.*

*I am the church! You are the church!
We are the church together!
All who follow Jesus,
all around the world!
Yes, we're the church together!*

Friends, you see, the church not about walls – it's about people!



And you know, this is what we are about today as we gather together on this Unity Sunday.

We come to worship this morning simply as a people. Today we have moved beyond the particular walls that set us aside, those walls that make us different or cause us to look inward at ourselves - to celebrate the things that are really important. And that is our common identity as a people of God who live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The church is not a particular liturgy. The church is not a certain worship style. The church is not a specific doctrine. And the church is not a defined set of regulations. Liturgy, worship, doctrine and church regulations are all important. But they can become walls that isolate, impede and divide. They are not, in themselves, the church.

The church is a people!

(7)



This morning three distinct congregations come together. There is the 8am West Epping traditional service, the 10am West Epping family service and the CSI Sydney congregation.

I pray that as we gather here, today, we will leave some of those “walls” behind to focus on the things that really matter. And, that, my friends is all about being a people – a people of God who bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord!

In the New Testament the church is referred to as the “ekklesia”. This translates from the Greek as “gathering “ or “assembly”. The word itself is a composite one made up of the preposition “ek” or “out of” and the verb “kaleo” meaning “to call”. Hence “ekklesia” can be translated as “a people called out”.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is what the church is – a people “called out”- a people “called out” to be God’s people in the world.

As three congregations gather here today, may we be a church “with no walls” as we live our lives for Christ in and for the sake of the world.

Amen.