

# St Edmundsbury Cathedral

18 July 2021: Trinity 7

Jeremiah 23.1-6, Ephesians 2.11-22, Mark 6. 30-34, 53-56

## Dividing Lines

May I speak and may we hear in the name of the one who loves us, who sustains us and who gives us life.  
Amen.

The clues would be too simple to feature in Victoria Coren's quiz show 'Only Connected'.  
China, Hadrian, Berlin, US-Mexico, the West Bank... at one time the walls of the Abbey of St Edmund.

Dividing lines.

One of my first dividing lines was across the middle of the bedroom I shared with my sister. One of us was tidy and organised. The other's school reports remarked how organised she was, but the state of her bedroom was evidence to the contrary. And so, after diplomacy and negotiation had failed, a line was drawn. Literally. Right down the middle of the room - in masking tape.

I can't remember how long it was there for, but it was a poor attempt at finding peace. The dividing line sought to regulate and keep order (or in my case, disorder). But far from being a just and peaceful resolution, the line itself simply became a further source of hostility. It might have helped each of us to retain a sense of control over our own spaces, our own identity. But it didn't really solve anything other than to emphasise our differences, highlighting the human tendency to try to separate ourselves from those who do not live like us and giving us something else to disagree about.

When I first read these scripture passages in preparation for this morning, my instinct was to share with you the story of the loving shepherd gathering the remnant of the flock – that they shall not fear any longer or be dismayed for the shepherd has broken down the dividing wall and proclaims peace to you who were far off and to those who are near. Come away with me to a deserted place and rest a while.

Sounds idyllic. And if this is what you need to hear from our readings this morning, hear it well. There is truth in it and I hope you find the comfort and solace and peace that you need.

The thing is... walls don't tear themselves down. Hostility doesn't simply disappear. It relies on coming together as one.

The walls of hostility are towering precariously high right now. Just take the headlines from the last week: climate change leading to floods across Europe, racial abuse of three young footballers, the decision to proceed with unlocking from tomorrow and the consequent accusation by others of reckless behaviour, the reduction in the government's international aid budget... these dividing lines are far from the idyll that we hope for... the kingdom is scattered, is being driven away. Through separation. Through hostility. Through exhaustion. It seems easier not to engage too much with the comings and goings. yet this isn't the first time I've felt compelled to raise these political issues from the pulpit.

All of these political dividing lines need attention and like the sick who were ceaselessly brought before Jesus and the apostles, these sources of hostility are being brought out into the market-places, into the public square time and time again..... they too need compassionate Christ-like attention, to be noticed and heard if walls are to be

torn down and healing is sought and ultimately found. The list of challenges to society, to our world are not going to disappear until they have received the same loving, compassionate attention that the disciples received from Christ as they returned from their mission.

We heard in the readings how we are being built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God. For the healing will be made possible through the body of Christ. Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread. I wonder if this is an encouragement to you? Or a challenge?

We are the body of Christ. We tear down walls and build up the common good. Don't we? How many walls have you helped to tear down this week? How many bricks have you removed? Or are we busy attending to the maintenance our own political, religious and social dividing lines?

Just think for a minute what they might be... the dividing lines in your life. Any sources of conflict or hostility? What is negotiable? What is non-negotiable in your eyes? And what if you were to look at them from a Kingdom perspective, from God's view. Are you looking to transform hostility into peace? To work for righteousness not self-righteousness?

When we are scattered. When we need a shepherd, remember. Remember we already have one in Christ Jesus. One who has torn down the hostility between God and humanity and by whose way we can tear down our own walls and any hostilities within our communities. How?

Yes, the Disciples knew that there was much to do. But amidst the busyness and all the work that there is to be done within us as individuals and across the community we must first come away to the wilderness, to that desert place alone with Christ. For there we will find nourishment, time to eat, and time to rest: and our perspective challenged and reoriented towards Christ before we then are able to truly follow the Shepherd in the pursuit of justice and righteousness and peace. How do we do this?

Rt Revd Michael Curry speaks of unity found through the seven practices of the way of love:

- Rest: place your trust in God who brings all things to fullness
- Go: listen with humility as you are reconciled in love with God and one another
- Bless: practise generosity and compassion with hopeful words and selfless action
- Worship: gather, hear the gospel, give thanks, confess, offer the brokenness of the world to God and break bread together
- Pray: dwell in God's loving presence and increase in the awareness of God's presence among us at all times and in all places
- Learn: read, mark and inwardly digest the scriptures for today – know God's story so that you can see God's activity in everyday life
- Turn: from the powerful shepherds that would destroy: sin, hatred, fear, injustice and oppression turn toward the way of truth, love, hope, justice and freedom.

Do this... and the walls just might come tumbling down.

Revd Sarah Geileskey  
Cathedral Curate

*Note that the sermon delivered was based on this text and included other interludes. The sermon was livestreamed and recorded and may be found on the Cathedral's website and through the Cathedral's Facebook page.*