

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

January 21, 2024



HARTLAND

Sharing the journey  
to know, love, and serve

## **Enemies of Abundant Living (2): Out of the Swirl**

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

**Series** We heard the introduction last week, this week we start getting into the meat of E Stanley Jones' daily devotional book, "Abundant Life" and the first two principles he names as Enemies of Abundant Living. While I will draw from his book for various service elements and portions of the sermon, and other sources on the same theme, there will be much that will not be said from the book, and so if you want to dig deeper, I'd encourage you to buy his daily devotional book in paper or electronic versions. If you do, for this week's service, see weeks 6 and 7, on the first and second enemies of life (1) a lack of faith in and loyalty to Something beyond oneself, and (2) self-centeredness.

### **Affirmation**

(P: Pastor, C: Reader with Congregation)

P: We are not alone, we live in God's world.

**C: We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

P: We trust in God. We are called to be the Church:

**C: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.**

P: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

**C: We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

"We Are Not Alone" The United Church of Canada,  
[united-church.ca/beliefs/creed](http://united-church.ca/beliefs/creed) (ad to be responsive)

### **Opening Prayer**

God of tent and temple, you are always calling us to come along with you into unexpected and wonderful places. We offer ourselves and our gifts given here and

through our banking systems to help your church to be dynamic and fluid, enabling each of us fulfill our role as a stone in your temple -- resting upon and supporting one another. Help us to remember and give thanks for those who formed this place before us, welcomed us into it and with whom we are still united on earth and in heaven. We ask these things through Christ our cornerstone. Amen

~ ad from "Prayer of Dedication (inspired by 2 Samuel 7, Ephesians 2:19-22, Mark 6)", Starters for Sunday, churchofscotland.org.uk

## Responsive Call to Worship

(R: Reader C: Pastor with Congregation)

R: When I adjust my life *only* to myself, I miss out on life itself. A person cannot center on oneself without spiraling into ruin. We come to this place to learn to live fully, abundantly, and overflowing.

**C: We come to be lifted out of ourselves and into God, that we might find freedom and find our true selves. His will is our home.**

R: As my lungs need air, my eyes light, my heart love, and my conscience truth; so I need God as the Life of my life, the Soul of my soul. I belong to him as a glove belongs to a hand.

**C: We will let all our being become rooted in God -- our thoughts rooted in his thoughts, our emotions rooted in his love, our will rooted in his will. Then we shall truly live.**

**Music** We have come to express our love to each other and to God, and to learn how to do that better and better. Our first song is a prayer that our love will supersede everything else and will continue to increase. Let's sing More Love to Thee, O Christ...

### More Love to Thee, O Christ

Words: Elizabeth P. Prentiss, 1869. Music: William H. Doane, 1870

1. More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee!

Hear thou the prayer I make on bended knee.

This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to thee;  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

2. Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest;  
now thee alone I seek, give what is best.

This all my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to thee;  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

## Intro to and Responsive Bible Reading 1

Like the songwriter, Paul tells us that now we strive to seek God and give our best, but it wasn't always that way. We all used to crave and seek peace and rest through earthly joys, refusing to obey God and chasing the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature, stuck in the pollution of unbelief and disobedience. It is a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with us.



(Summary of Ephesians 2:1-3)

(R - Reader. **C – Congregation**)

R: *But* --- God, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, embraced us. Even though we were dead in our sins, he made us alive in Christ.

**C : It is only by God's grace that we have been saved.**

R: God raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

**C: Now God can point to us in all the future ages as an example**

R: to show the incomparable riches of his grace and kindness that he has showered on us in Christ Jesus. Saving us was all his idea and all his work. We cannot take credit for it –

**C: All we can do is trust him enough to let him gift us with this salvation.**

R: It is not a reward for the good things we have done. None of us can go around bragging that we did it ourselves. We neither make nor save ourselves.

**C: God does both the making and the saving. We are his masterpiece.**

R: He has created us anew in Christ Jesus to join him the works that he does,

**C: the good things he planned and prepared for us to do long ago, and that we had better be doing.**

R: [We will hear later Paul going on to say that Christ's work, and therefore our work, is to break down division and unite on the cornerstone of Christ. Therefore, Jesus says]

R: Do not judge others, don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you too want to be treated with the same judgment.

**C: That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging.**

**R:** You will be treated as you treat others.

**C:** **The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.**

**R:** It is easy to see the speck on your neighbor's eye and be oblivious to the plank, the ugly sneer, in your own eye. How can you have the nerve to say, "Let me get rid of that speck" when you can't get rid of your own plank, when your own face is distorted by contempt? It is this play-acting hypocrisy all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part.

**C:** **Live *your* part and get rid of the plank in your own eye.**

**R:** Get the ugly sneer off your own face, and then maybe you can be fit enough, see clearly enough, to offer to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

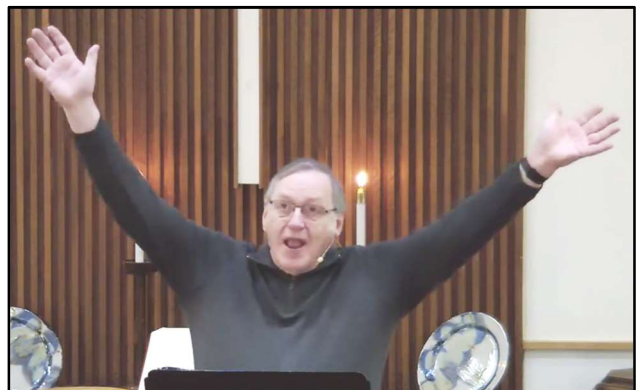
Ephesians 2:4-11, Matthew 7:1-5 (MSG,NIV,NLT) (ad to be responsive)

### **Theme**

I can't remember if I did this with a large group of children, or only talked with them about it. I'll present it like I did it. I once divided a group of children into two groups, one on my left and one on my right. I said to those on my right, "I want you to be my friend, here, have a jellybean." And I had this big jar of jellybeans and let them take a jellybean from the jar. Then I said to those on my left, "I want you to be my friends, have a good day." And they reacted with confusion because they saw the other friends get something, and they didn't. Then I asked, is it enough to say you want to be friends if you don't back it up with any actions?

God wants us all to back up our words with deeds, and to *show* the world our Christian faith by doing good things for others Also let them know that God does not want us to play favorites for some but not for others (See James 2:1-17ff) and then I gave the other people jelly beans too, of course.

God backs up his friendship and love by his actions in Jesus. A grandfather went to his daughter's home to visit. When he arrived, he saw his little grandson in the playpen. His hands were outstretched, "Out grandpa, out!". Grandpa reached down and latched on to both sides of him to pull him out. But then his daughter's voice came from the kitchen "He can't get out of the playpen - - he is time out." So here is grandpa, holding his grandson partly up in the air, staring into those big brown puppy eyes; with little tears



on the edge about to flow... longing to be lifted out his punishment. A few minutes later the daughter came into the room to see her father sitting in the playpen with her son.

I'm not sure that is a good strategy or not, but the point is" God is holy and always does what is right. He doesn't always let us escape the consequences of our bad choices -- but at the same time he loves us beyond what we can imagine. He enters into our messes with us... and stays with us no matter what. It is better and usually less hurtful to others and ourselves if we can be good and back it with good actions, but remember that on those few times we fail, he still has plenty of love and grace for us.

**Music** E Stanley Jones talks about a young girl who was going through a tough time and was told that God was in the room with them. "Then how do I find him?" There are many answers to that question, but the New Testament teaches that it is not just our search for him, but his search for us. We need to allow him to find us - -by not running from him. Turn to him with expectancy. Believe he is with you, and act that way. Set up visual reminders of his presence, Think about him throughout the day, spend time in quiet, pray in his presence with each breath... let's sing about his grace that finds us and leads us all the way home. Let's sing Amazing Grace.



### Amazing Grace

Words: John Newton; 1779, v 6 anon.

Music: 19th cent. USA melody; harm. by Edwin O. Excell, 1900

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;  
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
6. When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

**God Moments** (Testimonies from the congregation are not scripted)

**Music** It is evident all around us that God's amazing grace saves us, is with us, and guides us. As part of our prayer, we are going to sing "Lead Us, Guide Us" at various points. The pastor will cue us when to sing. But let's get the feel of the song by singing now and preparing ourselves for prayer by singing... Lead Me Guide Me...

### **Lead Me, Guide Me**

**(sung at various points throughout the prayer)**

Words-Music: Doris Akers

© 1953 Doris Akers, renewed, adm. by Unichappell Music, Inc.

Lead me, guide me, along the way, for if you lead me, I cannot stray.  
Lord, let me walk each day with thee. Lead me, O Lord, lead me.

## **Prayers**

### **Song is sung at the Lead Me Guide Me cue (LMGM)**

**LMGM** Living Christ, we look to you. there is no other thing or person to whom we can go who has the true words of eternal life, not only for the next life, but also for the abundant life here and now. We look to you with eyes of faith; asking that we can receive the power, the release, the victory we so deeply need. To do so, we ask that you lead us, that is why we sing **LMGM**

We confess Lord, like the camel's nose inside the tent on a cold day, asking if it can just poke its head in, and then it asks for forelegs, and then front body, then rear legs, and before we realize it, the camel is in the tent and we are out in the cold – we see that this imperious, demanding self of ours so often, so subtly, so gradually, gains our permission to hang around and pretty soon we are put out, unable to live with what we have done or desire to do — but now we give ourselves back to you for cleansing, for adjustment, for a new basis of living. Therefore, we sing **LMGM**

For we realize, Lord, that we cannot find a proper adjustment to life if we keep ourselves at the center of the Universe. We will find ourselves spiraling in on ourselves until ultimately, we find disaster. If we miss this lesson, we miss life itself. So teach us, it is why we sing **LMGM**

We present ourselves to you. We present others to you as we lift them up in prayer. We continue to pray for Pat Schleh's friend Elaine, for Jan Martin, for those not feeling well, for those facing challenges of any kind, for peace in our world and in our homes, We are thankful for the testimonies we have heard, for the trips that are being taken, for the joys that are being experienced because of your grace that

comes to us. We are thankful that through Jesus you have provided a door out of ourselves and into you. And in you we can stand up under life, so let all my being may die into you that we may live now and forever. Therefore, we sing **LMGM**

Lord, we strive to put into practice -- putting you in the center of our lives. Be in all things great and small. Then the small things will become great, and the great things become possible. How wonderful it is to live in cooperation with your wonderful plan, as we fulfill the living of the prayer you taught us to pray.... **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to and Responsive Bible Reading 2**

John 3:16-17 says God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, who came not to condemn the world, but to save it. We too, then are to love and befriend the world as God and Jesus love the world.

It can be confusing then, when his disciples say if you are friends with and love the world, you become God's enemy. But the clarity is in the context. Jesus loved the world so much he came to save people from its worldliness, to convert them away from sinfulness.

The disciples warning about friendly love of the world is joining in solidarity with the worldliness of sin against God. In the first, we love the world's people and want to rescue them, in the second, we love the world's people and want to join them against their Rescuer.



James describes the symptoms of worldliness and what it does to us.

R: Where do you think all these appalling fights and quarrels among you come from? Do you think they just happen?

**C: Don't they come from the evil desires at war within us?**

R: They come about because you desire your own way, so you scheme and are willing to kill to get it. You covet what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them.

**C: We don't have because we don't ask God for it.**

R: And even when you do ask, you don't get it because you are asking for what you have no right to [ask for]. You ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

**C: We're like spoiled children, each wanting our own way.**

R: You are adulterous people, cheating on God. Don't you know that friendship with the world makes you an enemy with God?... The Scripture says with reason that he is a fiercely jealous lover,

**C: who passionately longs that the spirit he has put in us should be faithful to him.**

R: He generously gives more grace in love.

**C: It is far better than anything else we will find.**

R: That is why Scripture says,

“God goes against the willful proud,  
but gives grace to the willing humble.”

So humble yourselves before God.

**C: We will let God work his will in us.**

R: Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**C: We will come near to God and he will come near to us.**

R: Quit dabbling in sin. Your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your fun and games and laughter and joy --- to gloom and sorrow and deep grief.

**C: We will humble ourselves before the Lord, and he will lift us up in honor.**

R: [And as God makes us right with him, he lifts us up. And as we heard in the first reading, to do the good works that Christ did, works that he expects us to continue – here is that mission...]

R: ...you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were out of it altogether -  
- far away from God,

**C: but now we have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ and are in on everything.**

R: For Christ himself is our peace who has made both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders one people when, in his own body on the cross, he tore down the dividing wall of hostility that we used to separate and keep each other at a distance....

**C: He created a fresh start for everybody...Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.**

R: So now you are no longer foreigners and strangers and wandering exiles. You



are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's family.

**C: He's using us all – irrespective of how we got here – in what he is building. We are his house.**

R: He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation, now he's using you, fitting you brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and taking shape day after day – becoming a holy temple built by God for God.

**C: A temple in which God is quite at home, a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

James 4:1-10, Ephesian 2:13-22 (MSG,NIV, NLT)

**Music** Biblically speaking, the world's pattern is an attempt to find personal peace by getting our way at the expense of others, while God's peace comes when we seek the peace of all... if comfortable standing, let's rise before the sermon and sing Let There Be Peace on Earth

### **Let There Be Peace on Earth**

Words: Sy Miller and Jill Jackson

Music: Sy Miller and Jill Jackson; harm. by Charles H. Webb, 1987

© 1955 Assigned to Jan-Lee Music, renewed 1983

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;  
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God our creator, children all are we.

Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me; Let this be the moment now.

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:  
to take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

### **Sermon Out of the Swirl**

Religious vocabulary can be confusing at times. "loving the world is good -- loving the world is bad." And some seem to believe the Bible is against self-love, against self-esteem, against pride. Not true. These are all healthy in their proper place. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, (See Psalm 139:13-14, 8:4 ff) God's craftsmanship gifted us to be and do a variety of purposes in our world. If we do not love ourselves in a healthy way, we will never become our best selves. Attempts to reject ourselves out of this life don't work -- it will come back in a different way and be even more difficult to deal with. I just read a meme that was attributed to CS Lewis, saying, "humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less."

E Stanely Jomes says we are structurally built to love others as ourselves. We love ourselves because God made us and declared us a very good creation (See Gen 1:27,31), and so we should not think of ourselves less than we ought, but according to the faith God has granted us; and when we strive to fulfill that potential we should rejoice for each other and ourselves for what we have done. (Romans 12:3,9-16 (esp 15) If we do not love ourselves, people will use us up and then discard us when we have nothing left to give.

Having said that, it is true that the Bible warns us often about the dangers of letting that love of self “go to your head” and developing an unhealthy, self-destructive disruption of these positive self-qualities. Self-confidence becomes self-righteousness, self-esteem becomes narcissism, pride becomes self-aggrandizement, self-care becomes an excuse for escapism, self-sufficiency becomes greed, and so forth... good qualities distorted from their good intent. If we love ourselves to the point that we don't love God and others, if we cannot find something outside of our own self to fasten our love and loyalty to, something that will give ultimate meaning, coherence, and goal in life -- we will spiral in on ourselves and drown, descending in a whirlpool of (spiritual) muck and mire.

This happens when we take the precious, valuable gift of life that we have received and turn our focus to ourselves and fail to recognize there are other gifts beyond ourselves. And the over-valued self begins to turn to selfishness and self-centeredness blossoms. Often people think that self-centeredness is especially the challenge of those who are struggling – they turn inward in the need to survive.

But I've talked with many who as children lived through the great depression. One thing absent from their memory was anyone's selfishness – the common plight drew people together to share and help even when they had almost nothing with which to help... They found a way because they didn't turn inward, but outward, toward each other... So while it may be a temptation for us when we struggle, the stronger temptation is when we experience success and accomplishment.

Hear this American's warning: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us." That is an excerpt from a speech made in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln. If it was true then, it is at least as true today.

Jones said, "when the freshness of God's presence is gone, ... we deprave ourselves by carving an idol; and the idol is usually just ourselves... when we lose God, then we become god." And the consequence is that we begin to sense we have a right to get our way – *all* the time. The problem is, the person sitting across the table or pew or boss's desk feels the exact same way, and that is why there is the bumping of heads. We read James warning to people who were chronically fighting. There was a toxic undercurrent always bubbling just beneath the surface just needing the smallest trigger to explode. James identifies the undercurrent as self-will which enslaved them to pursue only their *own* pleasure, power, and prominence, and not considering what God or others may want. Their war with each other was a really symptom of the war going on within each of them – the inner struggle projected out at each other in fault-finding and piously blaming each other for their *own* inner dissatisfaction.

Max Lucado quoted a story (that I have slightly shortened and adapted a bit) that spells out the process of moving from success and accomplishment to an unhealthy sense of self-security...

Two builders - two castles. They have much in common. They shape granules into grandeurs. They see nothing and make something. They are diligent and determined. And for both the tide will rise and the end will come.

The first builder is a little boy on the beach. He scoops and packs the sand with plastic shovels into a bright red bucket. Then he upends the bucket on the surface and lifts it. And, to the delight of the little architect, a castle tower is created. All afternoon he works. Spooning out the moat. Packing the walls. Bottle tops will be sentries. Popsicle sticks will be bridges. A sandcastle will be built. As dusk approaches, he knows the end is coming. As the waves near, the wise child jumps to his feet and begins to clap. There is no sorrow. No fear. No regret. He knew this would happen. He is not surprised. And when the great breaker crashes into his castle and his masterpiece is sucked into the sea; he smiles, picks up his tools, takes his father's hand, and goes home.

Second builder. Big city. Busy streets. Rumbling traffic. A man in his office. At his desk he shuffles papers into stacks and delegates assignments. He cradles the

phone on his shoulder and punches the keyboard with his fingers. Numbers are juggled and contracts are signed and much to the delight of the man, a profit is made. All his life he will work. Formulating the plans. Forecasting the future. Annuities will be sentries. Capital gains will be bridges. An empire will be built.

But this adult has forgotten. As the waves of years collapse on his castle, he is terrified. He hovers over the sandy monument to protect it. He blocks the waves from the walls he has made. Salt-water soaked and shivering he snarls at the incoming tide. "'It's my castle,' he defies. The ocean need not respond. Both know to whom the sand belongs...

(Max Lucado, *More Stories for the Heart*)

Novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote of a man whose highest pleasure was to possess land. Someone promised him that he could own all of the land he could walk *around* (create a circumference around) between sunrise and sunset on a given day. He began at a leisurely pace. However, driven by his ambition, he began to accelerate. He drove himself, sprinting faster and faster. He stripped off his shirt and abandoned his boots. As the sun set, he flung himself toward his destination. He reached the starting point closing the circumference of the property as the final rays disappeared in the west. Exhausted from overexertion, he collapsed and died. The only land he got was 6 by 2 feet. Tolstoy's story underlines the raging power of the drive for self-gratification -- destructively turned in on itself.

The solution to overcoming this temptation is to keep our focus (on self in appropriate ways, yes) but also on the will of God for us, and on the grace of God for others. God wants his people to live with a conscious commitment to follow his divine will, and to do it with others.

F.B. Meyer wrote about two Germans who wanted to climb the Matterhorn. They hired three guides and began their ascent at the steepest and most slippery part. The men roped themselves together in this order: guide, traveler, guide, traveler, and guide. They had gone only a little way up the side when the last man lost his footing. He was held up temporarily by the other four, because each had a toehold in the niches they had cut in the ice. But then the next man slipped, and he pulled down the two above him. The only one to stand firm was the first guide, who had driven a spike deep into the ice. Because he held his ground, all the men beneath him regained their footing.

It reminds us that we cannot ascend to great heights alone, we must rely on each other's strength and help. And we are bound in a living relationship with others,

but especially with Christ, the pioneer of our faith, who has solidly planted his cross before us, and because He stands firm in his love, we will never perish."

Lucado concludes the sandcastle story: "I don't know much about sandcastles. But children do. Watch them and learn. Go ahead and build [your life] but build with a child's heart. When the sun sets, and the tides take -- applaud. Salute the process of life, take your Father's hand and go home." [Pause]

You heard in the theme and readings how we have been touched by God's gracious mercy and love. It is entirely God's work - all we need to do is to receive it. When a child has a birthday, the entire family gathers to celebrate and give gifts. It doesn't cost the child anything; the child does nothing to get the gifts. Even the birthing on that day was granted by actions of the child's parents. The born one simply receives the presents, accepts them, reaches out and take them, and receives the joy of the gift of life celebrated.

Even the ability to receive is given by God. Like a baby in the crib, we can reach up, but we don't have the power to pull ourselves out. We must allow God to take hold of us and lift us up, out of, or through the consequences (deserved or undeserved) that life has thrown at us... Receive God's offer of grace, and then don't hoard it to yourself – by denying it to others.

According to legend, a man became lost in his travels and wandered into a deep bed of quicksand. One person saw the man's predicament, shook a scolding finger at him and said, "You should stay out of places like that." Another, who could see a bigger picture, walked by and said, "Let his plight be a lesson to the world." A third person ventured by and said, "Huh, it must be the will of God." Then Jesus appeared, stretched out his hand and said, "Take my hand, friend, and I will save you."

How will we respond to God 's love entering our lives and offering to save us? Will we receive him, allow him to take hold of us, and guide us and lead us? And then the harder part: how will we, in our turn, offer it as we have received it? Paul says we are granted grace because we were designed by God to be active participants in his good work [of restoring all of creation] (Ephesians 2:10) How will we do that?

Picture your ideal place. A place where you get your most joy, your most meaning, your most peace in life... Could be the golf course (probably not for most of us 😊) could be the beach, the forest, could be \_\_\_\_\_ --- whatever it is for you – fill in the blank. As you travel toward that place, see it in your mind's eye. You anticipate

the atmosphere, the tastes, the smells, the sounds -- and then you get near, you see a sign that specifically excludes you from entering your place.

The inner court of the Jewish temple was separated by a wall made up of equally spaced columns. Each column had a message inscribed in Greek and in Latin: "No alien (non-Jew) is to pass within the wall around the temple enclosure. Whoever is caught doing so must blame himself for the death penalty which he shall incur." You are banned from your ideal place.

Today, we still see too many examples of walls, barriers, and divisions. They may not be physical, but are formed out of attitudes, emotions, and even expressed often through nonverbal communication. Walls that have been built in the name of gender, and generation, and region, economic or other status, ability, politics, small or large nuances of faith, and the list is endless...

Paul is primarily concerned about the Jew-Gentile division in our reading today, but if we read a wide scope of his writings, what I named were clearly alive and well back then too. While the list of potential divisions is endless, it always boils down to two groups: US and THEM. The good news is that Christ has broken down the dividing walls so that we are no long us and them, but all are his; members of his household, and in peace with God and with each other.

\* Christ offers more than a **forced** peace that comes by conquering and domination (We are "at peace" because no one dares defy the prominent, powerful people, who in turn eliminates anyone who doesn't like them or is not loyal to them).

\* Christ offers more than an **individualized** peace (the world is going down the tubes, but I have "peace in my heart").

\* Christ offers more than a **spiritualized** peace (we have "peace within" while we continue to fight externally)

\* Christ offers more than a **pretense** of peace, where it is lifted in idealized words; but that do not really match what we feel within or our actions without. (Such as treaties or contracts that we have no intention of keeping)

\* Jesus Christ's peace unites us in such a way that treaties would not even be necessary -- because we do not see people in us-them terms; but as everyone as "we"; so that if we violate a treaty, we are violating ourselves; for we are all one. Peace is more than a lack of violence or conflict, but it is a sense of wholeness and completeness. So why, in our world, does it seem like there so little harmony, so little wholeness, if Christ has broken down all those walls? Why is there so much of that "us-them" thinking? [Pause]

Did you know that you can put a fish-eating fish in a tank, and dump some of its favorite meals (fish) in and it will gobble them right up? They will. Now, put a sheet of glass down the middle of the tank, and dump his favorite meal on the other side of the glass. The fish-eating fish will attempt to get at them but hit the glass instead. Eventually it will be conditioned to realize it cannot get at the fish it craves to eat. Now you can remove the glass. The fish-eaters favorite food can swim right underneath, over, and around; but it still will not eat; because it has been convinced that it cannot reach it.

We live in a world reeling from walls of sin and division and strife. Jesus has removed, or broken down those walls, but we have been conditioned to live as if they were still there standing strong and tall. We have the joy of teaching by our life and words that people can be freed from the prison of these powerless walls. The walls of hatred and division have been removed -- not so that we can devour each other; but so that we can realize we are all in one tank --or as Jesus put it last week: we are all in one pasture with one Shepherd. We are one in Christ.

On a practical level, I don't have the answers for breaking down the remains of powerless walls. I don't know how to achieve peace in the trouble spots of the world. We can pray for the leaders involved, and when appropriate, give money to those suffering in those areas... That is important.

But I am also reminded of a story. A fellow hails a cab in NY, "Take me to London." The cab driver says, "I can't drive across the Atlantic." The customer insists, "Drive me down to the pier and we'll put the taxi on a freighter and when we get off at Liverpool, you'll drive me to London; and I'll pay you whatever is on the meter." So they go to London. The passenger pays the toll and gives him a \$1000 tip. Now the cabbie is roaming about London and doesn't know what to do.

He spots a British man hailing him. "Can you take me to New York?" The cabbie can't believe his luck. How often can you pick up a return fare from London to New York? He says, "Where do you want to go?"

"First we go to the port in Liver -- ..."

"I know, I know", interrupts the driver; but where in New York?"

"I want to go to Riverside Drive and 104th Street."

To which the cabbie says: "Oh, Sorry, I don't go to the west side."

It is easy to talk, to supervise and to criticize -- to be the quarterback when we don't have to actually touch the football; to talk about things that need to be done "out there" because we can't do anything about it, so we have strong opinions

about what everyone else should be able to easily do about it. We aren't the ones as emotionally involved, (unless we choose to be). We aren't the ones sitting at the peace tables, we aren't the ones threatened with our lives daily because of the unrest... we don't understand the depth of division when we are not the divided one.

But what is even more difficult to talk about, or even think about, because then we might have to do something about it; is the high level of us-them thinking right in our own backyards, neighborhoods, towns, even in our own homes, and our own hearts. There is plenty of living among the ruins of broken divisive walls right here, all around us.

***Don't let those walls have power in your life.*** Don't let generation gaps, style preferences, gender, retired, working, economic or any other type of status or category allow you to think in us-them terms... Jesus preached to those who were far away and to those who were close so that they are no longer two but one.

There is a weathervane on the top of a protestant church in Oahu. It is shaped like a frigate bird with a fish in its beak. The name of the village (Haleiwa) is translated "house of the frigate bird". According to the church website, the religious connotation is brought together with the fish in its mouth. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men, and the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea gathered *many kinds...*" So it speaks of Jesus intent to bring us all together in one.

There is another steeple at a university chapel that has a weathervane on it instead of a cross. It was symbolic of the fact that people point in every direction, pushed by the winds of every kind of human thinking, driven by the ever-changing circumstances of life, spinning in circles without direction to life. It is the warning of the second enemy of abundant living (self-centeredness), you can't move forward well while staring at our belly button, focusing within. It'd be like walking in the forest with no paths while staring only at your feet -- you may go straight for a while, but you could just as easily go in circles and never know it. *If one organizes life around self-centeredness, disaster overtakes that self... and can only be overcome by a deliberate act of self-surrender, a willingness to die to this petty self so that a larger self might live.* Therefore, the solution to the second enemy is to not fall to the first enemy – which is to fail to have faith in and loyalty to Someone beyond oneself that gives ultimate meaning, unified direction, and purpose to life.



The weathervane on this chapel was saying we will be victims of these shifting winds until we find a faith in and committal to God that gives an unchanging steadiness to life. Lift your head to beyond yourself to God and others, recognize we are built for God and for unity. If anything but God is at the center, it may temporarily give local meaning and coherence to portions of our life -- but *ultimately* will fail. But if you place God in the center of your life, when you get the center right, the circumference, all the other relationships, will, in time, take care of itself, as you begin to find his direction and are led by him... He will build your life, and our lives together into his holy temple containing his presence, built on the foundational cornerstone of Christ himself.

And then after God who starts it all, it is up to you and me. To receive his grace, *and* to be gracious with one another. Let the peace and unity of “divisiveness destroyed” be the rule in and through our lives. Do not allow differences to hinder our lives together, rather, allow our various and unique gifts enhance our life together, and as God took the initiative with us, so we are called to take the initiative with each other -- to bring and offer peace and wholeness in Christ.

As we move into our future and build the next steps of our life, and of our church – put all your joy and effort into constructing an abundant life. Keep your – self - in a healthy proper balance. Become the masterpiece God wants you to become, by not forgetting others, and not forgetting God, and know that he is God, and is in this with us (and there are no “thems”), keeping us grounded and stable as we climb ever higher along the sometimes - treacherous steppingstones of life. Let us humbly draw near to him and he will draw near to us.

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, we thank you for loving us and making us all so special in your life. Forgive us when we get caught up and consumed in the power of selfishness and forget you and forget to realize others are also fearfully and wonderfully made. Help reconnect our focus on you so that you can lift us from the swirling whirlpool of self-centeredness that ultimately will drag us under. Sweep us up from the crashing waves to a new Center by your invading love. We want nothing less than you. We will not be satisfied with gifts; we want the gift of yourself filling every corner of our lives, for the marginal and temporary fails to satisfy, so we need you, at the center, and you, the Center will call us, and we will come in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Music:** We begin to find the abundant life when we are captivated by the love of God which keeps us from destructively circling in on ourselves and compels us to reach out in love for others. Let's stand as comfortable and sing Make Me a Captive, Lord

### **Make Me a Captive Lord**

Words: George Matheson, 1890. Music: George J. Elvey, 1868

1. Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.  
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.  
I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand;  
imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.
2. My heart is weak and poor until it master find;  
it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.  
It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain;  
enslave it with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.
3. My power is faint and low till I have learned to serve;  
it lacks the needed fire to glow, it lacks the breeze to nerve.  
It cannot drive the world until itself be driven;  
its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven.
4. My will is not my own till thou hast made it thine;  
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign.  
It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,  
when on thy bosom it has leant, and found in thee its life.

### **Blessing**

May the sun bring you new energy by day, may the moon softly restore you by night, may the rain wash away your worries, may the breeze blow new strength into your being, may you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life. (Apache Blessing) bringing glory to the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.