



SAINT LUKE'S

"JUMPING THE WALL"

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

ACTS 2: 1-21

PSALM 104

ROMANS 8:22-27

JOHN 15:26-27, 16:4B-15

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

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There is a famous Robert Frost poem that begins: *Something there is that doesn't love a wall*. As the poem unfolds, we learn that Frost's neighbor loves the wall between their properties, and carefully repairs it, building the wall back up stone by stone. Frost argues that if there are cows, a wall is necessary, but not between apple orchards and pine trees! Frost's neighbor often quotes his father: '*Good fences make good neighbors.*' Frost responds: *Something there is that doesn't love a wall/ That wants it down*'.

In our lives, we can inherit walls. We can inherit multi-generational hatreds that we absorb from childhood: Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Kosovo. Layer upon layer of stones are piled on: race, religion, ethnicity, land, heritage. These walls between nations are made even higher by unequal access to food, water, education, healthcare. These walls take generations to build and can take generations to dismantle, stone by stone.

Other walls we put up all by ourselves: walls of judgment, envy, mistrust, grudges. We might add new stones to our wall from time to time; polished stones of fresh grudges. Sometimes, co-existing is the most we can manage in human relationships. Parallel play, as child psychologists call it: two children, each playing in their own sandboxes but never playing together, on either side of an invisible wall.

At Pentecost we see something there is in *God* that does not love a wall. God continues Jesus' work of dismantling walls that seem so high that nothing can get over, under, around or through. Jesus does many

individual miracles which give health and life instead of sickness and death.

At Pentecost, God shows his full hand in a diverse community and just jumps over the wall all at once by direct intervention. If that happens in a hospital bed, we call it a miracle: a sudden healing. Pentecost is an all-at-once healing of a huge group. God breathes out: You are all one family. Many branches, one Tree. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit reveals what has always been true. You are one people under one God who loves you. One family. In a single bound, the Spirit jumps over walls of race, age, gender, religion, tribe, segregation. Instead of mistrust, a neighbor. Instead of stones, an outreached hand.

Walls often continue to exist not because of the *actual* differences between people. Often, walls stay in place because we deny *similarities* with our neighbor. We refuse common ground: our shared humanity, suffering, needs and dreams.

Let's look more closely at *how* the Holy Spirit descends on that crowd. They are assembled in Jerusalem for the harvest Feast of Weeks.¹ They are what we would call multi-national and multi-ethnic crowd. Among the Hebrew peoples there was great diversity of culture and language. In a pre-modern age, these different groups would have little exposure to, or understanding of, the other. Yet when the Spirit comes, no-one has to learn a new language. Everyone hears the gospel in their *own* language. No-one has to deny their culture or heritage. They only have

¹ Shavuot

to add two things: everyone else is equally part of God's family as they are. And Jesus is the broker and pioneer of this union within the love of God.

On the Day of Pentecost, I might have been one of the people watching who thought: this isn't really happening. This isn't real. But it is. The Holy Spirit is real.

Pentecost is an amazing high water mark for the church, but not the last. Jesus has told his disciples: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.* Truth continues to unfold. There is more to come. Pentecost is not contained, it is happening now and always. The Holy Spirit does not go backwards or get smaller.

A question for us: What are the walls we imagine God cannot jump over? What is it we think God cannot do in our life?

The Holy Spirit says: now *you* try. It is our turn. Pentecost is a day of unity and joy. If there is someone in your life you want to be reconciled with, today is the day to reach out. You may not succeed today, or next week or even this year. But take the first step today. In the Spirit, know that God is with you as you try to restore a broken relationship. In the Spirit, God is with you as you reach out again and again. In the Spirit, God is even now preparing a way for you to do this. In the Spirit, all human walls are temporary but communion is eternal, for we are one family within the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN

³ Jean Vanier: Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John

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