

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Watery Walls: Midway Spirituality”
a series on 2 Corinthians.
2 Corinthians 5:14-21
August 28, 2016

This week I found myself caught up in the sheer largeness of this portion of scripture we just heard. There is so much being said in so few words. This is one of those moments in scripture where things open up with this dynamic breakthrough vision of reality. It's a text that is completely transformative and pushing us to a different kind of seeing... a mystical kind of seeing... a unitive kind of seeing.

“Since One died for all, all have died... so they might not live for themselves.” It's a cosmic vision of the cross. The death and resurrection of Jesus isn't just a personal historic event, but a cosmic event... somehow involving the whole of the world.

And because of that we're to see all people in a completely different way. **“Not from a human point of view”** Paul says, but as part of this new creation that's happening.

It's a beautiful image, but so much larger than how we are used to interacting with one another and with our world. I mean, to see every single person as somehow caught in the expansiveness of God's new creation? It's a bit much to take in.

And truth be told,
I'm not sure my imagination is large enough to get there.

And then, he pushes us even farther. He says it's **God's doing, who reconciled us “In Christ...”**

It's that phrase Paul loves so much: **“In Christ.”** He uses that phrase in all his letters maybe more than any other phrase... and not in a way that's like belonging to a team. For Paul, being **“In Christ,”** is more like being caught up in a spacious reality, in an energy field that is surrounding and consuming us...

And not just us, he says. I mean, if he'd leave it as just me and you and the church in Corinth, maybe I could get there. Maybe I could wrap my mind around what he's saying. But he doesn't.

He pulls our imaginations open even larger and says, **“God was reconciling... not just us. God was reconciling the whole world in Christ”** Or another translation of the greek word he uses here, **“God was reconciling the cosmos!”** All of it, the fabric of the universe back to God's self, in Christ.

And when you begin to glimpse that, suddenly, what happened in Christ isn't just about me and my private salvation. It's not just about me going to heaven. Yes, it includes that, but that's just the smallest part of what is being said here.

God is reconciling the cosmos! All of it.

It's this huge beautiful idea. And part of me wants to grasp that... until I begin to think about what that might mean.

You see, there's another part of me that doesn't want to go there in my imagination... because I deeply resonate with the words of the famous philosopher, Linus Von Pelt. Linus holding his blanket nails me on the head when he says, **"I love mankind. It's people I can't stand."**

The really challenging part of this reconciling vision that Paul is describing, is both how vastly large this is, and how concretely particular this is all at the same time.

It's the universe and it's you.

It's those people that make me so angry, and the beauty of creation.

Miss either one and you're still not seeing how encompassing this is... and how uncomfortable this is.

God is reconciling it all... bringing it all together... in Christ.

The more time I spent with this, the more I began to see what a messy place it is there... in Christ. In fact, there might be some good reasons I don't want to be there... if it's where God is also holding the mess of the world.

This is where the gospel stops comforting us and starts challenging us. And maybe that's the Mid-way Spirituality part of this sermon. Midway on the road of this Christian life, you're challenged to see just how vast this Gospel is...

just how all encompassing this place of being "In Christ" is...

and what it might mean to be both reconciled to God and entrusted with this work of reconciliation.

In fact the more I worked with that this week, the harder it became to write a sermon in any typical kind of sense. So, instead, I began to write these lines and images, a poem of sorts...

And so, this morning, I offer you these lines and images that came to me, hoping that it opens you up to just how large and mystical and consuming this reality is that the scriptures are describing.

"Watery Walls"

Walls.

Brick by brick, stones stacked, one
on top of another, glued

together or separated
by mortar.
I can't tell which.

Walls everywhere. In every
place. Between
us and in us.
Division. Boundary. Separation
of all things. All people.

Two by fours. Insulation. Sheet rock dividing
one room from another, the inside
from the outside, here
from there.

Walls between me and you. Between
me and God. Between me
and my soul.

Walls that stop me from seeing
the other side, from seeing
where you are, from seeing
what you see.

But on these walls I hang
my pictures, my paintings, my life.
These walls that I look at day
after day, I've come to love. They protect
me. They comfort
me, and keep me.

Walls between
me and you. Between
me and God. Between
me
and my soul.

Walls separating good
and bad. Right and wrong. Saved
and unsaved. Separating
light and dark.

I like
my walls.

I like

my bricks
and mortar gluing together
or separating,
I can't tell.

It says One
died and so all
died. **But my wall keeps me
safe inside
from that death.**

It says One
is made new and so all
are made new, even me.
I and You.
All in Christ.

It says God is
reconciling all
bringing all to God's self.
I and you, in Christ,
I and the cosmos,
in Christ.
Reconciled, both
of us, me and him,

the little Syrian boy, 3 or 4 years old, pulled
from the waters,
the formless void where darkness
covered the surface of the deep
water that took his life.

And the little Syrian boy, 3 or 4 years old, pulled
from the rubble of stone and dust,
the rubble of country,
the rubble of war
and walls falling in on him,

body covered in dust
wearing a blood mask, eyes
blank and staring, silent
voice, no crying
he made.
Stillness
in the ambulance,
screaming out to the world.

3 or 4 years old,
pulled from the water or the rubble,
Brandt or Theo years old.

For him, the world is crying
on couches and in subways,
in homes and offices,
in every hand that holds a screen
playing the scene,
in every heart that knows
this little boy is every little boy,
is my little boys,

is me,
myself,
once a little boy.

And my walls quake and crack
with his. Blown up and crumbling
with his. Or maybe they like mist
in the night fade with the rising light.
The walls now more like water than stone.
Blood Red Water, a sea that once divided,
that once trapped me, that once enslaved me
and I'm pulled
through it on dry ground. God
brings me from my home to this unknown, opens
my eyes

to this little boy. I am he. He is
me. Us together in Christ,
reconciled in God,
the I AM,
Being
itself that holds us both, us
all.

Reconciled, not resigned, not blended
but brought together. Not
swirled and smashed but made
new.
Reconciled. No walls
or distance
or mortar
gluing together or separating, I think I know.

All things, it says.
Not just me and God.
Not just me and the little boy.
Not just me and you.
All things.

Me, and the guy who cut me
off and made me cuss.
Me and Them. Even Her,
That Lady. That
Man who votes for evil,
who is evil.

God is reconciling
them, that marriage defined by walls,
them, that partnership of anger
them, Hillary and Donald,
Ryan and Obama,
White and
Black and Blue
and Brown, Michael
that is.

We
are in the rubble,
are in Christ,
are in God, reconciled, he
and I. We and him,
you and them.

I don't know.

Maybe I'll take my walls,
swim back through the Red Sea, back
to Egypt with it's bricks and mortar,
where I hang my story on the walls
I know.

Because in Christ, is a bloody
mess. In Christ, God
is reconciling all
this; no, not to each other, but to God's self,
in Christ. This bloody mess is reconciled,
brought together, revealed
and made whole, healed
and made one.

All this. Even the cosmos, star
and galaxy beyond me, black holes
and negative space,
static radiation, anti-matter;
all this, in Christ.

Creation and me, reconciled
to God. The dogwood
tree outside my window, on the other
side of the wall, with its green leaves starting
to turn rust.
And the cardinal bird there, hopping from one
branch to another, it's deep blood
red body, like the face
of the Syrian boy. It's black mask
like my mask,
my wall
I hide
behind.

God is reconciling all things.
The little boy and me and
Republicans and Democrats and
bitter sons and angry dads and
the cardinal hopping in the tree and
the cosmos.
All things, held
in love, in Christ.

All things reconciled
by God to God,
by Love to Love.

And we, it's ambassadors.
We who have been pulled through the water,
Who have glimpsed through the window, that space
where light and dark come together
and both are held in love.

We who've seen
what's on the other side, who've seen
the wilderness journey waiting, who've seen
Promised Land fruit, who've seen
Jericho's walls fall down, who've seen
reconciling love,

are ambassadors, **going**
here and there, **telling**
on behalf of Being itself, **inviting**
the cosmos to **swim across**
or **walk across**
or come with **us**
through the watery walls

where all is held
and all is known
and all is welcomed
and all are reconciled
in Christ.

Amen.

Reflection:

*“Christ is the one whose center is everywhere
and whose circumference is nowhere.”*

~St. Bonaventure