

*A message delivered by Revd. Richard Becher at Carrs Lane on May 8th 2016*

## **Walking together on a new road made from the bricks of a wall...**

Acts 4: 32-37 and John 17: 20-26

I had a vision through which I have discovered an exciting new ministry of knocking down walls that divide us and using the bricks to build roads that bring people together....

This discovery inspired my poem on the service sheet, the story I shared and title for my message this week. If what Jesus prays for in John's gospel is ever to be fulfilled it's time to roll up our sleeves knock down those walls.

I have also realised that although knocking down walls can be great fun we won't be very popular when we've done it because most people actually like their walls. We shouted for the knocking down of the Berlin Wall, are appalled at Donald Trump's idea to build a Mexican Wall and believe it is wrong to build a wall between Israel and Palestine, but it's very different when it's in our own back garden!

This particular ministry is very personal because it is like trespassing into someone's back garden and knocking down the wall that protects them from the neighbour's dog, their screaming children or the creeping weeds that quickly spread. We like our walls and will justify the need for having them while demanding that others are knocked down.

Many walls between nations have been knocked down in the past, but there is one standing that is the greatest barrier to bringing us all together in justice and peace. It's the wall in the human mind. It is built with the bricks of fear and pride and until it falls we will remain a divided people.

I started knocking down walls when I was about six months old and would crawl across the floor and scatter the bricks with one sweep of my hand. I was discouraged from such demolition and encouraged to build instead. As I got older my practical gifts left a lot to be desired as the walls of the wardrobes brought from Ikea or MFI would collapse after a very short time.

My ministry was clearly to be one of helping make walls fall, not to build them up. It has taken me many years to discover this as a gift rather than a failure of any practical abilities....

It is only now that I recognise how Jesus had to knock down walls before he could build, telling the Jews that he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. (John 2: 19) He also told his disciples that a sign of the changing times would be when every brick had fallen from the temple.... (Mark 13: 2). We've still got a lot of knocking down to do and we will become very unpopular in the process.

The fact that we are here this morning suggests that we have heard a message that has encouraged us to believe in Jesus, but are we united as one with other believers or are there big walls that divide us? That doesn't mean we have to think the same; sing the same songs; pray in the same way or dance to the same music but if we believe in the one prayer we share we will be doing the will of God on earth as in heaven. That will unite us

as one family because “whoever does the will of our Father in heaven is brother, sister and mother to Jesus.” (Matthew 12: 50)

When we pray as Jesus asked us to we are not uniting ourselves in words which ask for all the work to be done for us, but are committing ourselves to doing the will of God for the kingdom to come. I like to make it personal by addressing God as ‘my Father in heaven’ and that ‘his will be done in my life on earth as it is in heaven’ because we can’t hide in the crowd expecting others to do ‘our Father’s will!’

The will of God is a community activity in which everyone has a role in helping build a new kingdom, but before we can build the new we need to knock down the old walls we have been living behind. Only when we can knock down those walls can we achieve the purpose of being united through the gospel message — which is to show the world a community at one with each other.

When we knock down the walls we reveal things which the world has not seen before. If we use the bricks to build a road we can walk together to a new destination. The biggest wall to achieving this though is in our own back garden — in our mind — where the bricks of pride and fear create ‘them and us’ divisions where people are excluded because their culture, religion, politics, class or gender are different to ours. Only when these walls in our mind are knocked down can we begin to show a new kind of human community which is united in the love shared by the Father and the Son.

As we hear the message and believe in what Jesus says we can hear the truth softly whispering through the walls we have built, but dare we knock them down to discover a face that belongs to the voice? We want to do the will of God and build the kingdom to come, but before we can build there is a wall to demolish so that we can use the bricks to build the road of my vision on which we can walk together. “Repent,” said Jesus, “for the Kingdom is near.” (Matthew 4: 17). It’s just on the other side of the wall!

The purpose for the unity Jesus prays for is so that through us as believers in his message the whole world will see in him the love of God which comes to save not to condemn. (John 3: 17) No-one is excluded from this love and when “all believers are one in heart and mind they will share everything they have and no-one will be in need.”

Is this the unity, compassion and charity the world can see in our Christian community or do they see big walls separating traditions and denominations causing tension and conflict? Is there a wall which separates the Church at Carrs Lane from the people of the city or can anyone walk in and out and experience the hospitality of Jesus? Can you honestly say that you don’t have a wall in your mind which is preventing you from being who God wants you to be?

When we don’t have walls to protect what we have and defend who we are we become vulnerable with the risk of losing what we have. It is the fundamental principle of our faith that in trying to save our life we lose it, but in giving our life to Christ we save ourselves. (Luke 19: 24) If we are more committed to saving a declining church than a world in great need the church will die, but when we dare to risk the life of the Church the world will see the hope of Christ.

I have been trying to get to know my grandfather better in recent years. He was Minister of Culture in the East German Government but I have only met him as a statue in a Berlin

park, through English translations of poems he wrote and through someone who researched his life and was curator of a museum of his work.

My grandfather was born into a Christian family in Bavaria but as he grew up and saw how the Church seemed to have abandoned the principles of the early Church he became a communist. He returned to religion for a while but back again and died in 1958 as disappointed with the direction of communism as he had been with the church.

He was committed to knocking down walls and uniting people in a peace the world still longs for not building them as bigger and stronger divisions between us. I am told he was an inspiration in his time, a poet who wrote with the words of a prophet and a politician still rooted in the true principles of justice for everyone.

He wrote the words for the East German National Anthem but they were banned because they sang for a united Germany to rise from the ruins and in some of his poems I identified the spirit of the early church inspiring a new kind of human community. He was trying to knock down the walls in the human mind, but that was like trespassing into people's back gardens and they didn't like it. Such radical messages don't belong to the world so whether we are communist or christian the world will hate you for trying to knock this wall down. (John 15: 18-19)

I have some things in common with my grandfather: I confess to being as disappointed as he was with the direction of the Church and, like him, I want to help knock down the dividing walls and with the bricks build from the ruins roads that unite people. That's my vision and although I don't have faith in the Church as an institution I believe passionately in doing the will of the Father who sent his Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to save the world.

I have a passion for what I believe in, as I think he did, but I know that the peace I believe in doesn't come from this world so I'm not going to let my heart be troubled or be afraid of knocking down the walls in my own mind (John 14: 27). I've got to do that if I am to think like Jesus and be at one with him and the Father because if people like my grandfather see evidence of that happening in the church they will know the truth.

So my vision is of believers knocking down the walls in their mind. They have been built with the bricks of pride and fear and we can use bricks to build a new road on which everyone can walk together regardless of race, faith and culture. Can we walk together on a new road made from the bricks of our walls or will our walls continue to stand as barriers to the unity of all who have heard the message....? Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is just over the wall!

When all believers are one in heart and mind — sharing everything they have — and there is no-one in need then the world will see how a new kingdom can come through people who live the will of God on earth as in heaven. There is a wall in my mind which says that is foolish, idealistic and impossible, but if I can knock down that wall I will find my way to the Kingdom of heaven. Will anyone join me in trying to knock down the walls in our minds?

a story to accompany the message:

## The noisy whispers...!

I was walking beside a wall when I heard someone call. I couldn't see the voice because the wall was so tall and the words that I heard came from over the wall...

There was no door in the wall for me to go through and it was much too high to climb over the wall. The wall was too wide to walk round and the wall was too strong for me to knock down...

From over the wall I heard someone call. It was whisper so soft I hardly heard it at all. I couldn't see the voice calling from over the wall....

It was a mystery. Who could it be? I couldn't see through the great brick wall. If I climbed to the top I could have a big fall and be broken like Humpty. So what could I do when I heard the voice call?

I listen to whispers. I'm a whisper listener. When there's a wall in the way I hear more than most people can hear. I hear the voices silenced by walls. I listen to the whispers from behind brick walls. Somewhere over this wall there was a someone who had something to say. The voice was too soft so I shouted over the wall: "Your voice is like a whisper too soft to be heard. Please speak a bit louder so people can hear every word."

Then from over that wall I heard the voice call: "I don't speak in a whisper. I can't speak any louder. I'm shouting at the top of my voice." So I said to the voice with no name and no face, that whispered from over the wall: "Ask your sisters and your brothers; your friends and your neighbours to all come together. Then their whispers will join into one voice to make a big noise!"

Now I couldn't see through the wall. I couldn't see over it. I couldn't see round it, but after a while I heard a voice call: "Please! Knock down the wall." The voice was louder than before, from behind the brick wall. Was it a voice with a face? Was it a face with a name? Or was someone playing a game? I didn't know! I needed to know!

I answered the call from over the wall: "I've no time to play games. Show me your face and tell me your name." Then I heard the voice from over the....(*where was it from?*) wall: "There is no door in the wall for us to come through and me and my friends are too small to climb over the wall. If you want to see faces knock down this big wall...."

The voice was still a whisper. It was too soft to be heard. It needed to be louder so we could hear every word. So the whisperers got together and found a someone from somewhere who's voice was still silenced by fear. That voice helped whispers make a noise that was heard from over the wall: "Please, knock down this big wall!"

It was so loud. It was so firm. It made me angry and shout: "Don't shout at me as if I'm to blame. I didn't build the wall between you and me. There's only one of me. I've got one pair of hands which aren't strong enough to knock down such a wall!"

Then from over the wall came one final call. What do you think the voice had to say? "We've gathered all our whispers to make one voice just as you said. Why can't your neighbours put their hands together and answer our call to knock down the wall?"

I answered that call by telling my neighbours about the whispers from over the wall. Then we joined hands to knock down the wall. Then our hearts came together in one love for the strangers whose voices we heard from over the wall. Their faces we now see and all have a name.... and it wasn't a game! It was helping whispers become a big noise — with the use of our hands!