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I have a tiny piece of concrete wall that arrived in the mail over 25 years ago. It came from a wall that had been broken down. But first, some background: While in seminary I had befriended a student from Germany, for I had been assigned as his host, selected as a welcoming student on campus to help him become acquainted with our community and to assist as needed. In the winter he discovered he hadn't brought a heavy coat, so since I had several, I gave him my winter coat. After we both graduated, he returned to Germany at the time the Berlin Wall was being torn down, a wall that had separated the nation for nearly 30 years. He sent me a piece of the wall, a symbol of how friendships can tear down the walls of differences.

The poet Robert Frost begins his poem "The Mending Wall" with the line, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," and then the poem describes how some stones had fallen out of the wall between him and his neighbor:

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.

*Breaking Walls*  
July 23, 2017

We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
When they come to a certain place in the wall,  
the narrator begins to question the point in having  
a wall between their orchards:

There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall.'

Robert Frost has a way of painting word pictures, capturing scenes of life through creative words. I imagine each of us can relate to those walls in our lives that separate us: Whether it's a neighbor who draws a line in the yard with a shovel so you don't mow his grass, a political leader who wants a wall built between nations, or the silence we build between relationships: we've all encountered walls.

*Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe*

*Ephesians 2:11-22*  
*Central Christian Church, Elkhart*

I'm not against all walls, for without them, the roof of my house would collapse, the stained glass windows in our sanctuary would fall to pieces, and the cold winter winds would chill us to the bone. We need walls to keep us warm and safe, and yet, some walls prevent us from connecting to those around us.

In the letter to the church at Ephesus, the writer suggested that Christ has broken down a wall—a wall of hatred that separated the religious from the unreligious, the aliens from the citizens, the insiders from the outsiders.

One commentary wondered what it was like to live in Ephesus as an alien, a Gentile, a word meaning someone outside the religious walls of the insiders:

What did it feel like to be a Gentile in Ephesus? Hard to say. Archeology tells us only so much about what life was like for residents of this Roman city on the sun-baked coast of Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. But as we read the letter to the Ephesians, we can imagine what they were going through, feeling hopeless

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and cut off from God. [The writer of Ephesians] says they feel like aliens (v. 12). We know what it is like to be alienated—removed, withdrawn and estranged from a community and from God.<sup>2</sup>

Most of us can think of a time when we felt alienated, left out, excluded. Maybe it was the school lunch table conversation. Or a joke that everyone else heard but you. How about the family trip that didn't include you, or the conversation at work that suddenly went quiet when you walked into the office. When plans were being made for a special event, no one bothered to ask for your input but expected you to do the cleanup. Estranged. Left out. Alienated. Outside the wall—a wall that needed to be torn down.

In addition to these personal kinds of walls, I've also encountered larger walls. When I visited Jerusalem ten years ago, the wall between Israel and the West Bank was still under construction, but as we drove along the countryside, I observed large stretches of the wall dividing the country. I learned that in 2002 before the wall, 452 deaths occurred

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*Central Christian Church, Elkhart*

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by terrorists. The year I visited in 2006 only 64 were killed, with our tour guide suggesting that the wall had created a zone of safety.

On the other hand, I also learned that many Palestinians on the West Bank can't get to their jobs or plow their farms on the Israeli side of the wall. In these cases, the wall has become a barrier, cutting them off from a means of survival.

At the General Assembly this month, we were reminded through a resolution that

Generations of [Palestinian] children have come of age as refugees living in refugee camps and behind walls. Generations of children have waited at checkpoints to go to school and return home. Generations of children have witnessed Israeli soldiers, many themselves young, harass and humiliate their parents. Generations of children have witnessed the demolition of their families' homes or businesses, theft of their land, or the destruction of their families' farms and orchards.<sup>3</sup>

When we build concrete walls, we also build walls of distrust and suspicion. We may think we are

safe behind the walls, but the long lasting effect on children is immeasurable. Walls often seem the simple solution, but deeper issues of fear remain behind the walls.

When churches received the letter to the Ephesians 2000 years ago, I imagine they felt a mixture of emotions as they tried to erect walls in the church. On the one hand they may have felt scolded, for there must have been some division within the church, for the author reminds them that they are all one—those born into the faith and those who came from the outside.

On the other hand, I imagine they also felt a sense of hope, for the writer celebrated that Christ had broken down the walls between their divisions. I like how *The Message Bible* translates a portion of this letter:

The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance...Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated

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by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody...Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals....You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. (2:14-22 selections)

Some walls needing breaking down, but that doesn't mean we're left alone in the midst of the scary nights, shivering in fear, for Christ invites us

to build something new with the rubble left over from our broken walls. Christ invites us to use the shattered pieces of our walls and lives to build something amazing: a structure where everyone is welcome. A place with walls of beauty with many open doors, and a sign saying “welcome” over each door. A place where hope is offered, regardless of one's religion or language or color of skin. A place where you can be who God created you to be, without fear of ridicule or scorn. A place where you can be honest and not be afraid. A place where we can be different and yet be one.

For in this place, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, supporting all the many parts together—even those with whom we disagree. Come, enter into this place where the walls are broken down, where you are part of building something new, and where everyone is given a fresh start.

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Military Occupation,”  
<http://ga.disciples.org/resolutions/2017/ga-1719/>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mending-wall](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mending-wall)

<sup>2</sup> The Greatest Gift of All Time, *Homiletics Online*, 7-19-15.

<sup>3</sup> “A Call for the Christian Church (Disciples Of Christ) to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli