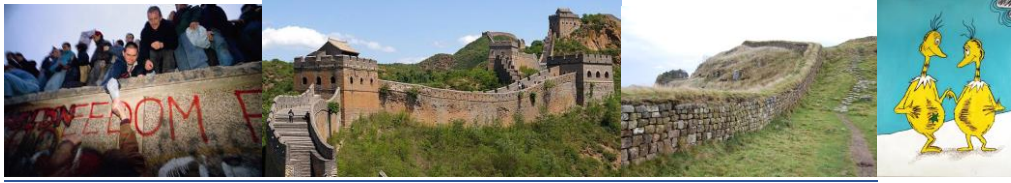


## Tear Down Those Walls

*(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Ephesians 2:11-22 & Mark 6:30-33, 54-56)*

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(Berlin Wall, Great Wall of China, Hadrian's Wall, Sneetches)

Tear down that wall! Do you remember who said it and when? It was Ronald Reagan talking to Mr Gorbachev in 1987. He was of course referring to the Berlin Wall which had separated East and West Berliners in Germany since 1961, a symbol of the Cold War. Two years later I remember watching in amazement as brick by brick it was dismantled in 1989. Families finally reunited.

We all have learnt about walls, borders, rings of steel in the last 18 months. During our lockdown last year, I would each week, experience the invisible wall separating Melbourne and Geelong. As I neared Little River I would make sure my paperwork was in order – my work permit and licence at the ready. You slowed down and took the turn off and waited in line for the police to check your documentation to see if you were legitimate. Now the police were always nice, but it was a little unnerving, and I got a tiny glimpse of what it might have been like in Berlin, or as an asylum seeker, or to live in places separated by walls or borders.

We have known other walls – The Great Wall of China – 13,000 miles long – conceived in the third century, visible from the moon, the remaining part built between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Built to stop invaders from invading. The Iron Curtain stopping westerners from entering Russia. Apartheid in South Africa – which led to riots, imprisonment of Mandela and hundreds of others, protests at sport matches. Even the invisible wall the government put around Australia some years ago, excising some territory in order to keep Asylum Seekers out. More recently the building of the Trump Wall between Mexico and USA began but was never finished thankfully.

These are physical walls but we also put emotional and psychological walls around us. For example, when I worked with young offenders, the physical prison walls separated them from society (often for good reason). However, it was the emotional and psychological walls around them that were more significant – lack of education, opportunity, employment or dysfunctional family backgrounds, effects of addiction, poverty or mental health that were bigger walls to climb.

We have economic, religious and political walls. Sadly, in many places still, understandings and misunderstandings of communion and baptism continue to divide Christians.

Walls can be both good and bad. They protect and provide an atmosphere of safety.

However, they also separate and divide. The Berlin Wall separated families. Their effects can just be cruel.

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Sometimes, like the borders/walls built around the Sneetches (Dr Seuss) they simply don't make sense. After a while we forget who and why we are trying to keep them out.

We build walls for many reasons. Fear, anger or resentment, to have power over another, for safety and protection.

Jesus was in the business of smashing down walls or barriers that divided – think the way he engaged with the bleeding woman or Jairus' daughter or the woman at the well, or the tax collectors or prostitutes.

Even when he tried to build a wall of solitude around the disciples it didn't work. Off they go in the boat to get some peace and rest, but the crowd follows and Jesus' compassion gets the better of him, and he finds himself healing, teaching and feeding the people, the people who looked like sheep without a shepherd.

The church at Ephesus had some dividing walls. The old cultic and religious rules were dividing people, this community was made up of Jews and Gentiles, and the demanding of people to follow certain rituals was dividing the people.

What walls have we built around ourselves? I know I have built a wall around myself so that a particular extended family member cannot hurt me anymore. I know I should remove it but I just can't yet. I know I must, as my understanding of the Christian faith, has reconciliation at its core.

Our church walls are sometimes a barrier to others – people of other faiths, homeless, addicted, mentally ill etc. How might we break through such walls to care for these people?

Just as Jesus smashed through walls that divided, he calls us to do the same, to smash through them or at the very least clamber over them to get to those on the other side.

When walls are gone, there is one unified group or family. Distrust falls away. Fear dissipates, anger dissolves, hope rises, love is experienced and reconciliation is possible.

Twenty years ago, this church affirmed a wall breaking mission statement. The Footscray Baptist Church celebrates the God-given diversity of cultures. We welcome you to join us in the journey of faith, whatever your race, religion, capability, gender or sexuality. Let's live out our statement of who we are. Let's tear down any walls that divide. Amen.