

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In the beginning of the year 1989, there were two Germanys divided by an Iron Curtain, one known as East Germany the other as West Germany. They were vastly different, the one in the east was a brutal communist nation repressing everything that could possibly be repressed including religion. Berlin was separated by a wall, one side belonged to East Germany, the other to West Germany.

It was about this time of year the Iron Curtain fell, sometime after that the wall was dismantled, demolished. Prior to that however, people of faith in East Germany knew the adversities and challenges of faith behind a wall that had literally gone up over night dividing families, a barrier separating Germans one from another. It was government against government, nation against nation, giving those behind the wall who were faithful, an opportunity to testify. And it happened, behind that wall, people of faith, many of them Lutherans, continued to preach, to teach, and to proclaim God's liberating word, witnessing to the truth, made free in Christ Jesus.

Now here in 2016 we know that the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the fall of the Iron Curtain, did not put an end to the divisions and barriers separating people. As joyous an occasion as it might have been, the problems have not been eliminated, neither in Germany nor anywhere.

New walls of hatred have surfaced, tension throughout the world, between much of Europe and Russia, all over the Middle East, over refugees, and here in the United States. We don't have to go anywhere to come face to face with walls of hatred, division, hostility and threats of violence.

Divisiveness continues to add to walls of hostility and animosity. Racism is increasing, the divide between haves and have-nots is at record levels, hatred and aggression toward people of other faiths including Jews and Muslims is increasing. Those with different life styles, sexual orientation, nationality find themselves on the other side of barriers seemingly erected overnight.

Don't we recognize we are all God's children? Were not all created by God the Father? Why do we continue to perpetuate the economic imbalances that separate us? What is it about the love of continually adding to our treasure of dollars that overrides God's command to love our neighbor as ourselves? Why do we fail to show hospitality to those from other countries, even looking down on them as inferior? Why do we let fear build walls between us? The truth is that fear and hatred build walls that may not be seen but that are every bit as real as the Berlin Wall.

But hatred, fear, distrust will not prevail! Jesus is in the world and he will ultimately triumph. There will come a day when these walls, these fears, this distrust will come tumbling down, not one stone will be left upon another, all will be thrown down!

We are Christians, Lutheran Christians and there is no reason in the world we can't live God's way right now. We see glimpses of the reign of God in the world today and as disciples you and I are called to faithfulness in the midst of these situations where walls divide us. It's not popular or easy to speak out against that which divides us, it's not politically expedient to call fear, malice and greed for what they are, but they are part of the evil that separates us. Jesus tells us "You will be hated by all because of my name."

You know, I've been called many things over the years, hypocrite by those who think all Christians claim to be perfect, and I've been called worse. Whatever I am, I am a sinner, but I'm a forgiven sinner. And in the name of Jesus and in the power of that name, I am, and we are called and granted the grace as forgiven followers of Jesus Christ to endure the struggle, to dismantle walls of hatred fear and despair, to throw down the stones of hate that separate us. Thanks be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, the living Son of God, whose willingness to give his life for the sins of all people, who has broken the power of sin and death, of hatred and fear, who empowers us and enables us to live his enduring way in the world, which we pray, will someday be a world without walls.

AMEN