

NEXT CHURCH

2017 NEXT Church National Gathering
“Wells & Walls: Well-Being in a Thirsty World”
Wednesday Closing Worship
Liturgy

Call to Confession (Written by Shelli Latham; led by Slats Toole)

It is not always with malice that we build walls . . . maybe not even most of the time. We have been taught that we are to be about the business of construction . . . of preservation . . . of purity. “But we worship what we do not know.” We hold sacred what we don’t truly understand.

And still . . . and always, our God remains faithful . . . Our God comes out and meets us in the most unexpected places . . . And where we expect to (where we maybe should) encounter walls . . . we instead find a well of forgiveness – of fresh starts and an invitation into a new kind of holy.

As I offer our Prayer of Confession, this morning, I invite you to reflect on the images on the screen. I also invite you to join me in a common refrain.

You will hear me say, “We build them up.” And I invite you to respond, “**Won’t you knock them down?**”

Prayer of Confession (Written by Shelli Latham; led by Slats Toole)

Let us pray.

Creator of All,

of the mountains that cut jagged and purple against an infinite sky,
of the forests that pulse like a heartbeat with an immeasurable collection
of wiggles and squiggles and colors and calls.

Creator of us - Imago Dei . . . made *in the image of God*.

And so we busy ourselves with creating too . . .

constructing, building, branding, barricading,

policing the sacred with a limited imagination for you unlimited grace.

And so we pray,
that you might overturn our misguided architecture.
For every barrier that should be a bridge
for every wall that should be a table,
we pray, O God,
when we build them up,
won't you knock them down?

Forgive us when we mistake safety for sanctuary,
when border walls are built on the brown side of our country,
when bans wall off the most vulnerable of our world in the name of "security",
when we budget for bombs and not for books.

Forgive us when we mistake safety for sanctuary,
when the bars of our prisons are straining against the weight of occupancy,
when detention centers treat those seeking opportunity as criminals,
when we stand our ground rather than extending our hand.

And so we pray,
that you might overturn our misguided architecture.
For every dead end that should be an opportunity,
for every stranger, who should be family
for every wall that that excludes in the name of "security,"
we pray . . .
when we build them up,
won't you knock them down?

Forgive us when we mistake exclusivity for piety,
when we comb your scriptures for who's not welcome in the club,
when we're more worried about coffee on the carpet
than the person clinging to the mug for comfort
when we relegate "that group" to the fellowship hall
lest they smudge the pews or play tic-tac-toe on the fellowship pads.

Forgive us when we mistake exclusivity for piety
when we forget our Savior's mom likely wore a head scarf,
when nostalgia and nationalism are confused for Christian values,
when Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week,
and we like it just fine.

And so we pray,
that you might overturn our misguided architecture.
For every rule that should be a question,
for every none who feels discounted and every done who's been good-riddanced
we pray . . . for the obstacles we construct to you . . .
when we build them up,
won't you knock them down?

Forgive us when we'd rather keep the crumbling old walls
because they served us well once.
Forgive us when our fear of discomfort prevents us
from asking the question about privilege
from relabeling the bathroom
from taking church out from under our steeples and into the streets.
Forgive us when our own walls are glass ceilings.
Forgive us when we say that "all are welcome"
but we mean only those who are sure that "all are welcome."

Overturn our architecture, O God.
It may be well intentioned, but it's not Gospel sound.
For every barrier that should be a bridge
for every wall that should be a table,
we pray, O God,
when we build them up,
won't you knock them down?

Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (Written by Shelli Latham; led by Slats Toole)

Family of God, the great Good News is that God does not leave us to our own devices to fumble and bumble with blueprints based on false piety and misguided sacredness. No . . . God breaks in to counter our misguided expectations, to disrupt our narrow scope of love and hope, and to let us loose to live into the expansive mercy and overflowing grace. In Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven and set free for singing.

[During prayer, slideshow of images of walls (compiled by Lisle Gwynn Garrity) flashed on screens:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5Aay2kJ4DhT3NfWW51VkdINTg/view?usp=sharing>]

Affirmation of Faith

Litany compiled from the Belhar Confession.

Liturgist 1: Whitney Fauntleroy, Liturgist 2: Sarah Dianne Jones, Liturgist 3: Slats Toole

ALL: We believe:

Liturgist 1: that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;

Liturgist 2: that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought:

ALL: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

Liturgist 3: that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;

Liturgist 1: that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways:

ALL: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another;

Liturgist 2: that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;

Liturgist 3: that we share one faith, have one calling,

Liturgist 1: are of one soul and one mind;

Liturgist 2: have one God and Father,

ALL: are filled with one Spirit,

Liturgist 3: are baptized with one baptism,

Liturgist 1: eat of one bread and drink of one cup,

Liturgist 2: confess one name, are obedient to one Lord,

ALL: work for one cause, and share one hope;

Liturgist 3: together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;

Liturgist 1: together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;

Liturgist 2: together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another;

ALL: that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness;

Liturgist 3: pray together; together serve God in this world;

ALL: and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

Liturgist 1: that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint;

Liturgist 2: that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

ALL: that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church. Amen.

Offering (Written & led by Lisle Gwynn Garrity)

When I live paint for worship, my hope and prayer is always that the art will speak in ways our words cannot. But, because we are Presbyterians, and we love words, I'd like to offer a few reflections as I have been creating this piece through the week.

On Monday of the conference, I was struck by the woman's remark, 'the well is deep.' So I wanted to imagine what happens when we are forced to stare down into a deep, deep well. What do we see? Perhaps we see a barrier, or a wall, and we hear the woman's words as the excuses we are quick to make also. Or maybe we see a tunnel leading us to something

— something that appears both far away or close at-hand at the same time. On Tuesday, I deepened the well. Because, ‘the well is deep,’ isn’t just a statement about limitation. It means this well has history; it has depth; it has the capacity to hold our life source throughout the ages. And now, today, I have been imagining what living water looks like. And my first impulse was to make the water bubble up and defy gravity and appear surreal and magical—and I think we like to imagine it that way. But as I continued to stare into this deep well, what I see is living water that looks like what we already know and expect: still, unmoving water. And maybe this feels jarring and disappointing at first, but if we keep looking, if we lean in far enough, we might just start to see our own reflections mirrored back at us. And maybe then we’ll know what living water really looks like when it comes to life in the world.”

For our offering today, we offer ourselves to the work of sharing God’s living waters in the world. Instead of giving gifts of money, we will commit to giving to others through our prayers and actions. During our first worship service on Monday morning, we invited you to write prayers for the people and places who need God’s living waters the most. Now, as we prepare to leave the well, our prayers for others become part of our own charge. As music is played and baskets are passed, we invite you to take one of these strips of fabric, to read its prayer, and contemplate how you might work toward the well-being of this person or place through your prayers, financial gifts, time, influence, or actions. Let us now share the well with the world.