

NEXT CHURCH

2017 NEXT Church National Gathering
“Wells & Walls: Well-Being in a Thirsty World”
Wednesday Closing Worship
Confession & Assurance
Written by Shelli Latham

Call to Confession:

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:

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 strain 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.
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

Family of God, the great Good News is that God does not leave us to our own devices, to fumble and bumble with blue prints 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