

Bridging Generations; It's all about the grace!**May 3, 2015****Psalm 100**¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.²Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.³Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.⁵For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.**Ephesians 2:14-22**

¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.**

Proclamation of the Word

This week members of our building committee and staff took one last close look at the Design of our renovation plans. I will say, I have never paid so much attention to the placement of sinks, cabinets, doors, and walls. In fact, I think we have had hours of thoughts, conversations, and emails about one particular wall down in Bethlehem hall.

Should it be a moveable hanging partition, an accordion partition, a hard wall, or finally, how about no wall??? Following Jesus' example, there will be no dividing wall :)

Walls- the purpose is to keep people out, or to keep people in, it seems. Walls are built to delineate territory. Walls are meant to divide. In our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes that Jesus has torn down the dividing wall of hostility between two groups of believers, the Jews and the Gentiles, the circumcised and uncircumcised, through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus is our peace, our shalom. In some ways, we could say then, that Jesus is the bridge. Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. Having reconciled us to God, we are to be reconciled one to another. He builds peace between his believers.

He is our peace.

Sir Isaac Newton once said, "We build too many walls and not enough bridges." I think he is right. Looking at our human history, we tend to divide more than unite. Look at the news this week of Baltimore- frustrations and violence break out when people have lived with poverty and crime. Even better though, we see also images of people being bridges: the young African American boy offering the policeman a bottle of water as he stands guard. Or the clergy who formed a human wall between angry rioters and the police. While some are destroying, others keep building bridges.

One of our brothers, Andrew Foster-Conners, a Presbyterian pastor, is a part of BUILD (Baltimorians United in Leadership Development)ⁱ. For over 20 years they have been trying to build opportunities, leadership, and more importantly trust between factions as a witness to Jesus Christ who came to build peace and to tear down walls that divide.

Andrew writes in an op-ed piece that he is not surprised at the eruption that has been brewing in the poorest neighborhood in his hometown of Baltimore. He attributes the violence to 40 year strategy to replace manufacturing jobs with downtown entertainment. Now Andrew and BUILD are working with Johns Hopkins to provide decent jobs to locals whose best chance is well-paying jobs. They are building a bridge to improve the lives of the people of their community. The church is involved because they know Christ is our peace, and we have peace to build and share.

In our own backyard, the tensions may be more subtle, harder to notice. Jobs are critical. People need mental and physical healthcare. Our own children feel the pressure to perform and achieve in ways that no generation has. We certainly have differing opinions on many things. But Christ came as a bridge to unite us with God and one another. Whether we are doing a building renovation or serving our brothers and sisters in Haiti, it is all through Christ. He is the cornerstone that joins two different walls together. Christ is our peace. And God in Jesus Christ creates a new community out of different kinds of people- as different as Jews and Gentiles.

Arland Hultgren writes about the church this way:

"We are all family, and no one is to be treated as a stranger or alien. Differences in race, class, gender, economic condition, politics, and opinion exist, but they are not barriers to living in unity in Christ. The congregation is a laboratory for the kingdom of God."ⁱⁱ

Have you ever thought about that? a congregation is made up of lots of different people so that we can be a laboratory for the kingdom of God. Unity is based on Christ, not anything we humans can build. I imagine if it were up to us, we would do more destruction than building. Instead, we are fully dependent on the faithfulness of God. The cross of Jesus has provided a way through. Grace is a gift

that we have received with open hands. Nothing we can do can make God loves us more or love us any less. Grace is pure gift.

And Christ sets the standard. After all that is what a Cornerstone does. It is laid first, so the rest of the structure in its example might be built into a dwelling place for God. A cornerstone is an example then that the rest follows and is built upon. Then it follows then that we the church, should emulate Christ and seek to follow his example. We are to be a grace-filled dwelling place for the Spirit to work and move in us.

Today, we dedicate ourselves to some rebuilding of the church that needs our love and care. It will take resources:

1. lots of patience as those who have lived through a renovation know,
2. effort- packing and moving out- you'll hear how you can help in the next couple of weeks
3. money
4. generous, grateful hearts which Fort Hill has in abundance

All gifts that God has already given us, but which we have to put to use. God provides for our need when he calls us to a task. We simply respond to that grace that has been first given to us. Our response then is not a burden, but a joy!

You have hopefully caught a glimpse over these last few weeks and through the videos and stories of how this work will impact lives. This faith community was built by prior generations and exists for us to enjoy. And our youth, children, and future generations will be impacted by our facilities, but even more, by the work of the Spirit. We have become members of God's household, full citizens with rights and responsibilities. So that God may build us together spiritually.

We are building a bridge so this generation may know the fullness of God's grace and the peace that is ours through Jesus Christ. After worship today, you are invited to take a stone and add to our Bridge on the bulletin board (In the covered arcade). Each person can add a stone to the bridge we are building. You are invited to write on that stone a person's name for whom you hope this effort will impact or perhaps the name of someone who has touched your life for whom you are thankful. You may even want to write something for which you are grateful about God or our church. Each of us adds an important piece to help build God's house. And stick around to enjoy some refreshments and fellowship afterwards as part of the celebration.

Our goal for our capital campaign is \$3 million. And the good news is that we have all the money we need. It is in our pockets!

Seriously, today we dedicate a portion of that which God has given to each of us to build up the body of Christ, his church. We do so not as a duty, but as a thankful response to the grace shown first to us by Christ and by those who have shown us God's love. Let's continue to be a church that welcome differences and like Christ, builds more bridges than walls.

Maybe you have already made a pledge and today, you are coming forward as an act of worship.

Maybe you have been wrestling with what gift you might give and how God might use you.

Pledge cards are provided in the Friendship register pads.

Maybe you made a pledge, but God has changed your mind and you want to grow your gift.

Whatever your gift, remember that it is a grateful response to what God has done in sacrificial love and in "faithfulness to all generations."

After a moment of reflection and preparation during the interlude, you will see on video the faces and voices of those of our church calling us forward in faith. Following that video you are invited, as you are led, to place your pledge card in the baskets here at the front or in the balcony.

Let's take a moment to reflect on God's gifts and how we might share them.

Laura Smith Conrad
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ⁱ <http://m.nydailynews.com/opinion/foster-connors-kelley-baltimore-predictable-eruption-article-1.2202614?cid=bitly>

ⁱⁱ Commentary, Ephesians 2:11-22, Arland J. Hultgren, Preaching This Week, *WorkingPreacher.org*, 2009