

On this Peacemaking Sunday, we gather around Christ’s table with Christians around the world. We catch a vision of how the world will be; a world free from the terrible divides of gender, race, and clan; a world where haves and have not’s no longer exist for there is enough for all; a world free from the fear that justifies anything and everything against “them,” because there will be no “them,” for “we” are all one in Christ. Today, at the table, we catch a vision of a world where we truly “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

The vision is breath-taking, but how do we get there from here? What are the next steps we can take to move the world in that direction?

Benjamin Franklin sagely advised us, "Love your neighbor; yet don't pull down your hedge." Robert Frost echoed his wisdom when he coined the phrase, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

Now, at first glance, the vision and the wisdom seem at odds. Fences keep out and keep in. Fences define and separate. Can’t we all just get along?

We can, and a good fence helps us get along with our neighbor; a good fence defines our relationship with our neighbor; a good fence can even help us transcend “getting along” with our neighbor to “love” our neighbor.

One person wrote: In function the Ten Commandments can be compared to ten posts supporting the fence separating the viable community of Israel from the marauding beasts of disorder, confusion, and bloodshed howling outside the pale. Of all the statutes needed to regulate the life of the community, these ten were deemed essential beyond all others. Should any one of these ten fence posts collapse, chaos could break in and wreak havoc in the community.

Consider one of these fence posts, *Exodus 20:8-10 (NRSV) Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work.*¹

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

So what was a certain pastor (who shall remain nameless) doing last Sunday afternoon mowing his lawn? In fairness, a neighbor was also mowing, but two wrongs don't make a right.

I thought about this as I went out to mow. I was mowing because I was busy. A full week loomed; time to mow would be hard to find, especially if it rained as forecast. One hundred years ago, a pastor mowing his lawn on a Sunday would be a scandal, an outrage; today, we can do whatever we want on Sunday. But in this 24/7/365 society in which we live, are we free to do whatever we want? Did I mow the lawn as a free man, or as the servant of a terrible necessity?

I wasn't the only person who worked last Sunday. My neighbor mowed his lawn too. Some of us work on Sunday, because the days of the blue laws when everything was closed on Sunday are receding in the mists of history to join Prohibition in the long list of failed attempts to legislate morality. In fact, a careful reading of the Old Testament will show that Israel's record is checkered at best at “remembering the Sabbath day, and keeping it holy.”

“Remembering the Sabbath day, and keeping it holy” is about more than what we do or we don't do on Sunday. It is an attitude as much as it is an action. We “keep it holy.” We set ourselves and our time apart for God. “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy” is a 24/7/365 commandment that invites us to entrust every hour of every day to our Caring Creator. As Jesus will later teach us, “Human beings were not made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for human beings.”

Are we anxious about what tomorrow will bring? “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.” Are we afraid we will not have enough? “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.” Are we tied up in knots because we feel we have to prove ourselves, our value, our worth? “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.”

Peacemaking Sunday offers us a vision of the world that is coming. It is a world of Sabbath; a world where every hour of every day is entrusted to our Caring Creator. We live into that vision one choice at a time – mending fences and maintaining our relationship with our neighbor. We get along now, but one day, oh one fine day, we will do so much more; we will love our neighbor and live together in peace.

Until that great Sabbath, this poem by Robert Frost offers us some next steps we can take today:

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors".
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there,
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."²

Amen.

² <http://www.mamalisa.com/blog/robert-frosts-proverb-good-fences-make-good-neighbors/>