

## “WE’RE ALL WET”

January 12, 2014

Our prejudices run deep; we see the color of skin; we listen to the language used; we watch the way they behave; and before we know it, we’re playing favorites and treating some better (and some worse) than others.

God help us; we know better and we mean to do better and be better than that! Perhaps we bristle at the allegation that we have prejudices; we’re not bigots; we know that racism and those –isms are wrong. That’s not us! We’re better than that! Maybe we even remind ourselves of the ways we’ve been on the receiving end of prejudice, because of our age or our gender or our point of view. We’re not prejudiced! We know that kind of thinking is all wet!

William Willimon wrote, “Faith, when it comes down to it, is our often breathless attempt to keep up with the redemptive activity of God, to keep asking ourselves, “What is God doing, where on earth is God going now?<sup>1</sup>””

We’re better than basic bigotry, but God is still way ahead of us. God is still doing new things that turn our ways of understanding ourselves and our world upside down, and the gospel calls us to get going because we have a ways to go to catch up.

Our lesson from Acts offers us Peter’s response to God turning his world upside down. Peter was a Jew; Cornelius was a Gentile, a Roman, and a resident in the Roman city of Caesarea. Before that day, Peter knew it was wrong for him to be there. Before that day, Peter knew that he was clean and Cornelius was defiled; God’s grace, mercy, and peace were for Peter and his people, not for Cornelius; Peter knew that, but in Acts 10, Peter learned that he was all wet and that Cornelius was all wet too.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts*. Interpretation. Ed. James Luther Mays. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988). 99.

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Peter would never have darkened a Gentiles’ door before that day, but the Holy Spirit prodded, the gospel of Jesus Christ compelled, so he stepped into Cornelius’s house and said: *Acts 10:34–35 (NRSV)* “*I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*”

We have a ways to go to catch up to Peter’s gospel vision and live into the reality that we are all wet.

As we worship, a group of Presbyterian pilgrims is in the Holy Land and they are blogging about their experience (the blog is titled “Dispatches from the Holy Land”). One of them, Luke Rembold, wrote the following poem entitled,

“Raise the Wall.”

How do you raise a wall?  
How do you raise that security blanket  
pulled up right under your chin  
so you can sleep better at night?

How do you raise a policy that  
safety is the top priority?  
How do you raise that fear,  
that idea that you need to be protected?

How do you raise a wall  
that separates  
the haves from the have-nots  
the powerful from the powerless  
the oppressor from the oppressed?

How do you raise an idea?  
How do you raise the notion  
that humanity is not created equally?

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That in order to have and be let be  
you must look and sound like me?

How can you raise that wall  
of apartheid and power?

How can you raise a barrier  
that prevents conversations  
that limits opportunities?

How can we raze the wall?<sup>2</sup>

Peter begins to answer these questions by reminding us that Jesus got wet; he was baptized. *Acts 10:36–37 (NRSV) You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:*

The Prince of Peace came into this world that we define by division and separation and demonstrated that God’s new day had dawned when he chose to be baptized; he chose to stand in solidarity with us and with all humanity; he chose to come near and be with us even though it meant being all wet.

We choose to stand with him when we are baptized and when we have our children baptized. We choose to live out the vision of God’s new day that razes walls and banishes fears for we all live together in peace. We choose to affirm our common humanity; no one is different; no one is other; there is no “us and them,” because we’re all wet.

The classic movie “The Shawshank Redemption” offers a powerful witness to this reality. The movie tells the story of Andy Dufrense, a banker wrongly convicted of murder and sentenced to life in Shawshank State Penitentiary. The movie’s narrator is Ellis Boyd “Red” Redding, played by Morgan Freeman. Andy is abused and

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<sup>2</sup> Luke Rembolt, “Raise the Wall” Dispatches from the Holy Land. January 10, 2014.  
<http://peacedelegation.wordpress.com/2014/01/10/raise-the-wall-by-luke-rembold/>

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suffers but he never loses hope or his vision of life as a free man on a beautiful beach. He lives that freedom out every day in that prison. On one memorable occasion, he hijacks the prison’s PA system and broadcasts an opera. Remembering that day, Red says, “I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't wanna know. Some things are best left unsaid. I'd like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you those voices soared, higher and farther than anybody in a grey place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made these walls dissolve away, and for the briefest of moments, every last man in Shawshank felt free.<sup>3</sup>”

Baptism – Jesus’ baptism, ours, and theirs casts a beautiful vision; a vision of a world free from fear; a vision of a world in which we all live together in peace; a vision that we can live into reality one day at a time by choosing to affirm our common humanity and refusing to build walls on the ground and in our hearts to separate us and them.

*Acts 10:34–35 (NRSV) “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”*

Our prejudices run deep; God’s love runs deeper. God shows no partiality. The gospel calls us to get going and do the same. Jesus was baptized. We were baptized; they were baptized; and in our baptisms we were set free from fear for peace. There is no “us and them,” because we’re all wet. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> January 10, 2014. [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The\\_Shawshank\\_Redemption](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption)