

Order of Service -- September 16, 2018
A Holy Meeting Place

Musical Prelude "Imagine"

Greeting -- "The Border is a Threshold"

1st Hymn: We Worship God in Many Ways, Green 275

Readings -- Luis Alberto Urrea; Matthew 5:43-46; Acts 17:26-28

2nd Hymn: Song of Peace, Green 304

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude "Dona Nobis Pacem"

Prayer -- Song of Peace

3rd Hymn: Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race, Green 320

Message: A Holy Meeting Place

Silent worship

4th Hymn: In Christ There is No East or West, Green 305

Closing -- A threshold through which we carry our hearts.

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting

Good morning Friends. It's wonderful to be here with you...

Yesterday, a number of Friends from our region gathered here, and we explored the possibility of reaching for the Sacred, across what divides people in our country and our world, in this time. Preparing for yesterday and today I've been thinking about those divides, the walls we erect figuratively and literally between ourselves and others, the borders we place.

Luis Alberto Urrea, a Mexican-American author, has reflected that borders are liminal spaces, from the Latin "limin" for threshold. Borders are thresholds he reminds us -- a place of crossing, of encounter, of two things meeting. He says that borders are rich, creative, fertile places, "where the plankton wells up and the currents meet."

With all the shouting and anger in our country right now it's hard to believe that on those thresholds, in those meeting places, God is present. But yesterday and today, I think we come together, to this meeting place, to imagine it: that places of division and difference can be, might be, Holy places. So for today, let's say that they. Let's say that God is at the border, and on each side. And let's begin by singing our first hymn, in praise of the God who is present everywhere, on all sides.

First Hymn: We Worship God in Many Ways, Green 275

Reading For our first reading, I have taken an excerpt from an editorial article in the New York Times, written in March of this year, and combined it with an excerpt from an interview with its author, Luis Alberto Urrea whom I quoted to begin our worship today. The interview took place in July of this year, on the program 'OnBeing' with Krista Tippett. Both interview and article describe the same situation, with no contradictions or details that do not concur, but combining them made for richer imagery.

Otay Mesa, right along the Mexican border, was once inhabited by the Kumeyaay Indians. Their nation extended from the Pacific Ocean to the Colorado River. Tribal historians say they lived there for 12,000 years...In January, the orchestra conductor and percussionist Steven Schick led a concerto at the seaward end of the border wall, out west, still on Kumeyaay land. His great idea was to have a group of Mexican musicians on the Tijuana side, and a group of American musicians on the American side play a concert through the wall, invisible to one another, but all the while creating art that transcended borders. ... Mr. Schick told me he had been in Berlin during the days of its wall, and observed that on the Western side of that wall, it was painted with art and raucous and alive and rebellious. He reflected that it is the Mexican side of our border wall that is ablaze with color. It has become an open-air art gallery. A graffiti magnet. A place of murals, poetry, and political messages, taco stands, art carts and strolling musicians, mariachis, ice cream vendors, lovers, people dancing, knickknacks, soda and puppies for sale. On the American side, it's a no-man's land in the desert, steel, helicopters, guns, featureless concrete. No art. No graffiti. Terminators with black helmets on ATVs, dogs holding the American audience back from the wall. Contact must be avoided at all costs. Suddenly I realized, he said, that that clean, controlled, shiny and militarized wall was the Soviet side in East Berlin. So what is that wall for? Who's free and who is the prisoner? Who is the other? Americans are dreamers too, Mr. Trump said in his inauguration speech. Here's my dream: There is no them, there is only us.

Matthew 5:44-46 ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his

sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you?

Acts 17:26-28 From one blood he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps reach for him and perhaps find him—though indeed he is never far from each one of us. ²⁸For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his children.”

Second Hymn: A Song of Peace, Green 304

Prayer *Holy One, God of all the nations, hear our song. Hear our song of longing, a song of peace, a song of reaching and searching for You, for it is a song that rises from both sides of all the walls we have built. From both sides of all the walls we are building. Oh Sacred Source of Life, One in Whom We live and move and have our being, how is it that we still think there are places where you are not? How is it that we forget that we are your children? How is it that we forget that they, all of them -- on all the other sides of all the other walls, they are your children too? We ask you please to hold us close, as we reach for you. Hear our song today and hear the prayers for peace whispered even as the steel and the concrete divide heart from heart, neighbor from neighbor, brother from sister, child of God, from child of God. Please help us today to remember, every time we forget, that there is only one of Us, one blood among all the nations, one song, one prayer, one longing for You. We pray this together as one body, one body of seekers, one body of Friends, one body in Christ, Amen.*

Third Hymn: Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race, Green 320

Fourth Hymn In Christ There is no East or West, Green 305

Benediction

This benediction is inspired by the poet laureate of Arizona, Alberto Rios.

The rain falls on both sides of the border wall. The song rises from both sides of all divisions. Birds nest and fly from both sides of the wall. The land is ancient on both sides of the wall. The border says stop to the wind, but the wind speaks another language, and keeps on going. The wall is an act of a thousand imaginations, a real crack in a make believe dam, a mighty red line, like the parting of seas. The border is where we come together, where we meet. The border is a threshold, through which we carry our hearts.

Message

On the first day of school, it was 95 degrees out and humid. I picked my boys up at the end of the school day and we found a beautiful swimming hole in a magical place not far from where we live in Tompkins County, where several cool, clear streams come together, cutting steep gorges through shale rock. The woods that day were cool, dark and hushed; patches of sunlight shone down through the canopy and into the green water, so that we could see our toes down below us, flashing like goldfish. Walking upstream, there is a small waterfall and a deep spot for jumping off, and, when we left the water, at the start of the trailhead that leads out and toward home, we found a shale rock wall on which have been placed hundreds of stone hearts: small stones, large ones, tiny ones, really big ones that must have taken two people to move. People have, over years, placed their rocky offerings side by side on the crumbling ledges of this shale wall, so that it is simply covered with hearts.

I have thought of that wall of hearts often in the last two weeks. The way it was a natural boundary in the land, a demarcation -- a border -- between water below and earth above and a place of connection, of coming together, where tree roots twined, snaking down from up above, making spaces where small animals could nest and pebbled hearts could rest securely. I've thought about how, as rocks go, shale has an unstable, movable and moving kind of quality, a way of wearing away over time, eroding and crumbling, and we could observe the evolution of time in this one, as shale ledges had crumbled over the years, dropping their hearts to the base of the wall in a pile of shards and fragments of stone. The way it was nestled at the foot of a trail through the woods, in a hollow, a place where strangers travelling a common path found and placed their hearts with care, side by side and among the hearts of unknown fellows. It has, in fact, seemed to symbolize to me a very great truth. Which is that what divides and differentiates -- walls, boundaries, borders -- also, somehow, are the very things that make love and connection possible. To adorn a wall with hearts is to place a symbol of love, with care and deliberation, upon a symbol of separation and division. It's to bless the place between, the meeting place, the liminal space, and to call it holy.

Holy, because love is what happens in the space between. Because connection is only ever connection across -- a distance, a difference. 'Between' and 'across' only happen in the borderlands, where difference exists and is encountered. Could we love, if there was not an I and a Thou? Could we know the risk of vulnerability, the courage to reach across, if there was no distance that required us to stretch out our hands, to offer up our little stone hearts? In some sense, lines of demarcation and differentiation are the place where This exists, because That does, where I exist because Thou dost, where the forest exists, because the stream runs beside it, where Mexico is, because the United States has been called into being, where liberals make their stand because conservatives do.

At the end of June, my family attended a rally in Ithaca to express our dismay at the forcible separation of children from families at the US/Mexico Border. At that event, I saw several signs that said 'Abolish Borders.' I think I understand that the deep message those fellow rally goers were trying to express is the understanding that in some very real, consequential, and deeply damaging ways national boundaries and borders are arbitrary demarcations decided by power and violence, and that the human family faces in this time perhaps more urgently than ever we have before the very great need to reach across what divides us and to understand how fundamentally we are actually inextricably connected, of one blood. And I get both that that is too much to put on a sign, and that it is right and just to critique the walls that are built and reinforced by fear, power, or greed. Still I think that a call to abolish borders is unlikely to convince those of our fellow citizens who support a wall on the US/Mexico border adorned not by hearts but by barbed wire to come over to our side of this particular wall on this particular debate. To these fellow citizens, I think those signs might as well be saying Abolish the United States. Abolish how I know where my country, my home, ends and another begins. Abolish how I know who I am. Abolish my me-ness. That isn't what those Abolish Borders signs say or mean, but I can understand that that is how it might read to someone who is afraid of identities and lines of identity demarcation that **felt solid** now shifting, like shale. Because what separates and divides into Us and Them has been, for many humans, for many millennia, the whole curriculum, the means and the end of the story we are telling. In defending militarized borders, literal or figurative, between nations or people, humans have taken our boundaries, our meeting places, our liminal spaces where I meet Thou, and encased them in

concrete just trying to make solid, strong, permanent and invulnerable who we think we are, or who we always thought we were, who we have experienced ourselves to be. The Bible is full of those kinds of stories, of the chosen and the elect and the saved reinforcing our walls, adding armor to our borders as the best way we know how to be sure we exist, and to protect that existence with whatever it takes.

There is another story, too, just as old, also in the Bible, and somehow arising from and answering that first story, as if adding a syncopated rhythm to the drumbeat for war. This one says that we are all God's children, all the varied peoples and nations of the earth. And that the marks of difference and demarcation are allotted by God, marked by the Holy, so that somehow, it's our very distinctiveness, the way we feel separate and different, that is the condition that makes it possible for us to search for the Holy, and reach for the Sacred, and maybe even find It. And in our apparent separateness from each other and distance from God, while we are many and varied, we also all live and move and have our being in the Holy One. And while the boundaries and walls **are** part of the mysterious way that God works, they will all, eventually, like shale, be worn down in time that we cannot fathom. In this story, we are challenged to love our enemies, those people on the other side of the divide, because something about that practice is what makes us children of the God who gives life to those on all sides of all the walls, all the borders. In this story, we are learning how to be distinct, **and** we are coming to know ourselves, all of us, as part of a larger whole, outside of which there is no Us. That larger whole not only transcends our divisions, but uses them, so that we can make beautiful music together, so that the line between me and you can be a festive, joyful, raucous and alive place, where art is made, and love happens. A liminal place. A holy meeting place. That is what I saw in that shale wall of hearts that I found with my boys. An affirmation of that second ancient story, and hundreds of little acts of faith by strangers that we **can** learn to love and that what separates and divides is the exact lesson plan.

So, if our aim is to learn how to love across boundaries, better signs than Abolish Borders might be queries, in the Quaker mold. Like: How Joyful Can Your Border Be? Like: What's on the Other Side of Your Border? Or maybe, a little edgier, What's Your Boundary Saying About You? Or then again, perhaps we

could just offer a simple invitation to Us and to Them, and, with signs and music, prayer and song, say to any who would be our enemy *Come, Friend, Bring Your Heart to The Wall.*