*God’s Household*

Ephesians 2:11-22

It was a perfect day. The wind, barely perceptible, had little impact on the game. My rival launched the shuttlecock with deadly accuracy right to the corner of the boundary marker. But I rose to the challenge and hearing the solid sound of birdie meeting racket, I knew my return made its mark. Back and forth we sent the birdie soaring over the net 5, 6, 7 times until with one final muscled whack my rival sent he birdie sailing back to my side of the net. I knew beyond a doubt that to let it go meant having to retrieve it from the next door neighbor’s year. That meant going through the gate of our fenced in yard, across the driveway, and through the neighbor’s gate into their backyard. My only recourse to avoid that journey was to run, jump and meet the birdie before it could enter into someone else’s backyard. The running wasn’t a problem.. Jumping seemed to come easily with determination, and the racket met the birdie mid-air with a decisive encounter. The problem came with my landing. You see, the fence was covered with climbing roses and is wasn’t the sweet smelling flowers that caught my attention that day. I don’t know how many times my mother told us to stay out of her roses, but there I was right in the thick of them, feeling their painful defensive thorns poking holes in my much too sensitive skin. Badminton and rose bushes are not a great mixture. Fences may make great boundary marker, but they can be limiting, especially when paired with roses. I think that might have been the last time I played badminton 9n our backyard.

Fences, walls, barriers, all designed to keep out the unwanted and keep in the wanted. Paul knew full well what kinds of barriers humans build to keep each other in isolation. The first Christians were Jews and had a great understanding, because of their history, of what God might be doing in Jesus Christ. But the Gentiles were being invited into the process too. No longer did the Jewish Christians have an edge. The law codes had become too riddled with impossible legalisms. A fresh, new start was needed to get the world involved in God’s plan. A new way of relating to God had to be established and that way of relating came about through Jesus Christ. The hostilities between Jew and Gentile had to end. So Christ equalized the playing field. The Jew and the Gentile were counted equal in the eyes of God and of Jesus. The walls and fences that had kept the two sides apart came down. And through Jesus both Jew and gentile shared the same spirit and had equal access and blessing from God.

It isn’t any different these days. No matter how we come to Jesus, we all share equally in building a spiritual home in this world, in building God’s household. God uses each one of us, no matter how limited we view ourselves or others or our faith, we each have a purpose and are a part of what is being built. We all belong here and have the right to the name Christian. We don’t have to get hung up in someone else’s standards about what it means to be and live as Christian. We each grow into the holy as God leads us and guides us. If I believe Jesus, I am a Christian and that is it. No one can convince me differently, even if they happen to believe in a different way of expressing that belief. The basic belief that labels us Christian is that Jesus was the Son of God, died on the cross, and rose again so that we may forever be in right relationship with God. But there are million ways of saying that and unfortunately we build walls and fences around our particular way of expressing that and in building those walls and fences we keep other out and ourselves in. In essence we limit our vision and often limit the possibility of deeper growth into God. We are called to be holy, but we get off course so easily. We get distracted defending our own version of what it means to be Christian. We even set aside the “love” that characterizes a Christian, to defend our “belief” in our way of being Christian.

Why is it important to keep going back to our core beliefs as Christians? So we can be better instruments of sharing the good news with others. I would like us to watch a video of a powerful witness of God’s ability to work with us and through us to bring about hope and new life to others. Pay attention to how this young lady’s core values changed through the transformation that God brings about through the witness of another.

(Show video)

It’s not about the ways we believe we must believe. It is about the ways we let our belief continue to transform us into better witnesses of that belief. It’s about knowing God deeply enough to trust God will continue to work through us to being about the transformation of the world. Christians get themselves in trouble when they say, this is the way life must be lived, this is what Jesus meant, these are the rules, to the exclusion of all other ideas about the Christian faith. We become judgmental, and exclusive in ways that limit our capacity to do our part in God’s work of redeeming the rest of the world. We can stand firm in what we believe, but we must allow Jesus to continue to guide us through the messes and controversies we find ourselves in these days. Open hearts, open minds, open doors is a good slogan for us only if that is what we practice. Remembering that God embraces all peoples and sees possibilities in each one is vital to our health as a people of God.