

March 3, 2024
Third Sunday of Lent

Sermon: Boundaries

About a week and a half ago I took a mandatory refresher course dealing with the topic of Boundaries. Amongst other things, we talked about the Sexual Misconduct and Response Policy and Procedures and the Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Prevention and Response Policy for the United Church of Canada. As I read the Old Testament lesson for today I was reminded of the various types and purposes of boundaries.

Boundaries have been with us a long time. In the 21st Century B.C.E. the Sumerians built the Amorite Wall to protect themselves from attack from the Amorites. It was about 100 miles long and ran between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The Great Wall of China, parts of which date back as far as the 7th Century B.C.E., really got going in the 3rd Century B.C.E. and it's construction went on into the Ming dynasty from the 14th to 17th Centuries. It runs thousands of miles and was started to protect against attack by the Mongols.

The Long Walls of Athens enabled the Athenians to replenish supplies during times of attack by partitioning off a peninsula. You see, Athens was four miles from the coast and there were two important ports along the coast. Without those walls, built in the 5th Century B.C.E., an enemy could surround Athens and starve the people out.

Likewise, Hadrian's Wall, from the 2nd Century, protected Roman Britain from the Picts, the Great Wall of Gorgon, from the 5th Century C.E., protected the Persians from the Hephthalite Huns, and the Walls of Constantinople, also from the 5th Century C.E., protected the people of Constantinople from the Arabs and the Huns.

As much as they claimed that the Berlin wall, started in 1961 and expanded up until 1989, was purportedly to protect against fascist infiltration, but it was really built to keep East Berliners in.

There is also a wall separating Gaza and Israel, and parts of the border between U.S.A. and Mexico have a wall or fence, and there are even discussions about protecting fortress America from Canada.

Walls aren't the only kind of boundary. Rules are a kind of boundary. Some people don't like rules. They don't like being told what they can or cannot do. They feel that rules shouldn't apply to them. Take the protests against mask mandates during the pandemic as an example. Rules and, more specifically, laws are there to define what is acceptable behaviour in our society. They exist for the benefit of society as a whole. Rules and laws may be seen by some to be a limit, but they act to free people to live in safety and peace.

That is what the Ten Commandments are about. The intent of them isn't to prevent people from doing certain things. The intent is to enable people to live in peace and security. The intent is to allow relationships to flourish and people to thrive in community.

We just read the ten commandments. How many of you can recite all ten of them, in order, right now? Let me help.

God's number one.

There's no number two.

God's word is sacred. Don't use it in vain.

Remember the Sabbath.

Honour your parents.

Do Not kill.

Do Not break your wedding vows.

Do Not steal.

Do Not spread misinformation, or act as a false witness.

Do Not covet what is not your own.

The first five are positive. They are actions to be practiced.

The last five are negative. Do Not do these things.

There is even a sense in which Lent itself is a boundary. A boundary between the trials of life in the world as we have structured it, and new life in Christ, who lived the kingdom of God. May we all successfully cross that boundary. Amen.