

Bridges not Walls

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One of the best things about the ELCA Lutheran church is the way we build bridges across race, culture, people of different socioeconomic levels, sexual orientation, denominations and with other faiths. We have always taken seriously the way of Jesus - to love our neighbor - through relationships, conversation and action. I am proud that we can hold different theological views and be extensive in our biblical interpretation. Sometimes we have been named as the “grey church” because we understand complexity, and are not black and white. In our churches people have always been encouraged to ask questions, and sometimes to live the questions over time.

A big challenge now, in light of the presidential election, is to love people who take a different political view than ourselves. Can we bridge those gaping divides, or will we create our own walls between each other? As the church, I hope we can continue to have conversations with one another about God’s place in the world in spite of our political differences.

At Christmas time we worship our “down to earth” God who revealed himself as an infant in a manger, homeless from birth. Kelly Fryer in her book *Reclaiming the “L” Word* talks about our Lutheran understanding of God’s grace using the symbol of a downward arrow because “God always comes down”.

God bridged the gap between us by coming down to us as Jesus. Through Jesus we have an overpass; one who passes over our sins by dying on the cross.

How do we, as the body of Christ, build bridges instead of walls? How can we lead the way in this world and in our communities with people who are very different from us, and whose values and choices we do not share? I presume God still loves us all. Can we? And if so, how do we do that as the church when we will clearly disagree with decisions and leaders. Even within our family, let alone church families, there will be sharp disagreements. In order to love each other, do we go silent on anything political?

I suppose we will have to live the question. There is no single answer, and it is an ongoing challenge. If God continues to love us all in spite of our differences, then we are to try to love our neighbor just as Jesus said. Our capacity to love will be stretched, as Jesus arms were stretched out in love for us.

God came down to earth to show us how to live and how to love. He shared his theology, interpreted scripture, taught, healed, forgave, extended grace, and loved. He addressed hard questions and told stories.

It is an important time for us follow Jesus and live into his ways. The world needs our Lutheran way of building bridges, listening and valuing differences. As the church, we could be an example for others.

...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903
in Letters to a Young Poet

