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 St. Stephen's Church (Sewickley, PA)  
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 Series: Lectionary / Title: "Hammer Time: Break It Down!"  
 Proper 11: Isaiah 57:14b-21, Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-44, Psalm 22:22-30

**Isaiah 57:14b-21** "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way."

<sup>15</sup> For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. <sup>16</sup> For I will not contend for ever, nor will I always be angry; for from me proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life. <sup>17</sup> Because of the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry, I smote him, I hid my face and was angry; but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart. <sup>18</sup> I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and requite him with comfort, creating for his mourners the fruit of the lips. <sup>19</sup> Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the LORD; and I will heal him. <sup>20</sup> But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. <sup>21</sup> There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked."

**Ephesians 2:11-22** <sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands -- <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

**Mark 6:30-44** <sup>30</sup> ¶ The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late; <sup>36</sup> send them away, to go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat." <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." <sup>39</sup> Then he commanded them all to sit down by companies upon the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. <sup>41</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. <sup>43</sup> And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

## 1. Intro

- a. I have experienced many betrayals in life. Like the afterschool specials that tell you “Just be yourself—what matters is what’s on the inside.”
- b. Lie!
- c. Have any of these people been to high school?!
- d. Human existence is almost entirely defined by creating standards and then judging people by how they measure up.
- e. **This is universal.**
  - i. **Boston:** Be intellectual, be into food and wine, and art. But not too flashy.
  - ii. **LA:** Be impossibly beautiful.
  - iii. **Sewickley: Women:** involves yoga pants and nice cars, golf, paddle tennis, and for some, horses. **Men:** certain kind of job and an air of someone who, in his youth, had a great deal of athletic prowess.
  - iv. **Current iteration in NY/SF/LA, etc., (going mainstream thanks to the Jonas Brothers, Green Day, and others): The Hipster:** Dress like the 1950s/1960s (or the 1980s) but with a lot of tattoos and listen to really obscure bands that basically sound like 1970s rock. Drink black coffee—never Starbucks—and be hyper Green.
    1. Skinny jeans, small t-shirts, etc.
  - v. **This all demonstrates the universality of human beings making external standards that you have to follow in order to be accepted. We make a wall, and say, good people on this side, bad people on that side.**
    1. As St. Paul says in our Ephesians 2 passage today: the dividing wall of hostility.
  - vi. This is a major human problem—we all are incredibly anxious about this, but we are total slaves to this system.
  - vii. And the answer involves someone coming from outside the system to break down the wall.
- f. **MC Hammer**
  - i. To illustrate, I have a little clip I’d like to show you.

1. Takes place in LA at a clothing store frequented by hipsters. Inside the store it's very serious and very hip.
- ii. A little background here:
  1. MC Hammer was a big star in the early 1990s. His big hit was "Can't Touch This" (Follow up: "Too Legit To Quit"). He was famous for his dance and for his "Hammer" pants. Big parachute pants. Like any tattoo featuring a Looney Toons character: Looks ridiculous now, but seemed like a good idea at the time.
  2. So Hammer Pants (Which I'm wearing under my cassock) and the Song "You Can't Touch This"
- iii. Watch the clip:
- iv. That was a flash mob. And they were wearing hammer pants.
- v. Just shows how when we are all laboring under standards of performance, we often need someone to come from the outside to free us.
- vi. They break in, break all the rules—hammer pants are the opposite in every way of skinny jeans—and in doing so, set everyone free. Suddenly, there's laughter, people are interacting. There's freedom.

## 2. Segue:

- a. Which is just what today passage from Ephesians 2 is about.
- b. St. Paul is writing this letter to a group of Christians who knew a lot about how standards create a dividing wall.
- c. In their context, it was a religious standard—and it separated Jews and Gentiles.
- d. As Paul says, Circumcision vs. Uncircumcision: This made a clear dividing line.
  - i. <sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands -- <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
  - ii. Hear that: Separated, alienated, strangers... no hope and without God.
- e. In the Jewish system you had to keep the Law of Moses, with all its regulations, and it was epitomized by circumcision: a visual sign that separated Jews from everyone else.

- f. And in Paul's day, this was the standard that separated the good from the bad.
- g. Standards by default divide people into groups. That's what they're supposed to do.
  - i. We see it with STANDARDized tests, we see it in fashion, we see it in churches.
  - ii. We people, we always draw lines. Good/Bad. Acceptable/Unacceptable.
  - iii. Those lines, those standards, always mean someone is outside.
    - 1. See, standards tend to break relationships. Just set some standards for your spouse who eats too much, or for your kids who aren't cutting it.
  - iv. And with God, in the old covenant, standards defined who was near God and who wasn't.
  - v. And based on our track record, most of us don't meet the standard.
    - 1. We'd like to think we do: Elaine on Seinfeld: She lies (pretends to be deaf so she doesn't have to talk to anyone) and is totally self-centered. But she says, "I'm a good person."
    - 2. But we lose our temper, we ignore people we dislike, we lie to our loved ones. I could go on. We ignore the unbelievable suffering in the world and our own community and instead buy a new TV.
    - 3. So what's the answer?

### 3. Main Point:

- a. **First: Jesus is the end of the law, the end of the standard.**
  - i. There was a line dividing good from bad, and what Jesus did was erase the line.
  - ii. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> ...[Jesus] has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.
  - iii. Didn't just go get the "bad" people and bring them over the wall to the "good" side; he actually demolished the wall.
  - iv. "Abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments": What does this mean? Talking about the cross.
  - v. He takes all the standards—meets them—and totally fulfills the law.

- vi. The law is now totally satisfied—and then he breaks his body for you. He gives his record of perfection to you.
  - vii. Romans 10:4: “Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”
  - viii. The commandments, the ordinances, the standards are abolished. Because he met them all.
- b. Second: This is for the good and the bad:**
- i. **We want to move beyond this. “I already accepted Jesus.” I don’t need to hear this anymore.**
  - ii. **But look at this:**
  - iii. <sup>17</sup> And [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.
    - 1. **Far off: Gentiles, bad, pagans, partiers**
    - 2. **Near: Jews, Good, lawkeepers, hospital volunteers, Prius drivers**
  - iv. **Apparently both kinds of people need this message.**
  - v. **Because no matter how good we are—we are not good enough.**
  - vi. **We all break the rules. Doesn’t matter how good we think we are. What matters is God’s law, not ours.**
  - vii. **So God changes the game.**
  - viii. **In Christ, he’s no longer keeping score. Jesus got the high score, he gave it to you, and now he has reconciled you to God.**
- c. The result: No more wall, so people can come together. You’re God’s house—part of God’s family. You get connected to other people, which becomes the building where he dwells.**
- i. <sup>19</sup> So then you... you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.
  - ii. You have been made so right—you have been declared “OK”—so much so that now God wants to live in you. He makes all of us his temple.

- iii. Amazing when you think about what the Temple was: The Holy of Holies where no one could go except priest once a year. But now we're the Temple and God dwells in US!!!
- iv. Not because we're so great, but because God has, in Christ, broken down the dividing wall, removed the standards, and said, I regard you as clean because of what Jesus has done, come on in.

#### 4. Final Word:

##### a. Sum up: What have we said:

- i. **Human existence is largely about creating and meeting standards.**
- ii. **This naturally creates division.**
- iii. **And we need an outsider to break down the dividing wall.**
- iv. **St. Paul points to this in Ephesians 2:**
  - 1. **Jesus breaks down the wall. Erases the line that "standards" draw.**
  - 2. **This is for the good and the bad. The Near and the Far. Because we all need a righteousness that doesn't come from ourselves, but from God.**

##### b. Final Word:

- i. We always go back to building walls.
- ii. Human history
  - 1. End of Civil War, then go to Jim Crow
  - 2. End of Cold War, but Russia is again asserting its superiority and nationalism
  - 3. Schools introduce uniforms to end the student cliques, but students always find a way to form little groups.
- iii. But remember, Christ is the end of the Law.
- iv. The Law is no longer a wall. Law is only about Love. And we only love because we were first loved.
- v. That's what following Jesus is about:

- 5. "He who has been forgiven much loves much."

Proper 12: 2 Kings 2:1-15, Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16, Mark 6:45-52, Psalm 114

Ephesians Reading:

I, Paul, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

### Thoughts:

v. 12: "having no hope and without God in the world"

Description of life without God.

But there was a system to get to God. It involved circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses.

But the standard itself creates a wall. A standard defines who's in and who's out.

There is a "dividing wall of hostility."

But this is the solution:

<sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

Like Hammer said: Break it down. Jesus breaks down the wall. He abolishes in his flesh the law!!!!

We need someone to come from the outside and break it down.

We are reconciled. The hostility is over.

This message is for the saints and the sinners. We both have a need for our standing with God to be not about ourselves but about what God has done in Christ.

Look at what Paul says:

<sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.