

1) “*HE TOUCHED ME!!!*” {Children squabbling in the back seat of the car}

“*I’m drawing a line between you! Don’t let any body parts cross it, do you hear?*” {Parent response}

“*She’s very BOSSY isn’t she? Yeah, she sure IS!*” {Children protest}

Welcome to summer vacation! It’s pay back time for the parents who did just the same when they were kids.

- Something significant is getting worked out in the give and take of such back seat brawls, however:

Kids both *defining their own personal spaces* and *trying to engage each other’s spaces*

Learning both to *draw boundaries* and to *make connections*—difficult dance to learn

- A dance all of us do our whole lives long, and we never quite manage to get it down pat.

If we don’t *invite* one another to *share* our spaces,

we end up *isolated* and *alienated* from each other

But if we perpetually *invade* each other’s spaces,

we end up *overwhelming*, even *annihilating* one another

- Setting boundaries and making connections—it’s a very hard balance to strike.

Robert Frost put it well: *Good fences make good neighbors.*

That phrase bears repeating: *Good fences make good neighbors.*

What *are* good fences? Good question!

2) Growing up in racially segregated Birmingham, Alabama, I saw a lot of fences that *weren’t* so good.

- Water fountains and rest rooms labeled *Colored* and *White*

- Separate entries to different cars on the zoo train—the entryway divided only by a line of string  
But if you ever stepped across the line, you quickly found it wasn’t nearly as flimsy as it looked.

- Bus seat boundary line: a sign *colored/white*—that could be moved, depending on size of each group.

I was taught by my parents that all people were equal; but I was also a child of my culture.

One day when I saw fifty black folks crammed into five rows in the back, I was indignant.

“*This isn’t fair—this isn’t right,*” I thought, “*they should move the sign forward to give them more space.*”

I was clearly fenced *in* to the insidious social fault lines that fenced black people *out*.

- These fences were good at doing what they did; but they didn’t do any of us any good at all.

Boundaries became barriers, then barricades, and eventually battle lines. It was a very stormy time.

3) This morning, Mark has told us two interconnected stories of dramatic healings.

- My first response is: *Wow! How did Jesus do that?*

To that, Mark would surely answer: *He did it however he did it, but HOW is not the point.*

*The real question isn’t ‘HOW did Jesus DO that?’ but ‘WHAT is Jesus DOING here?’*

Mark tells a whole string of stories about the awkward give and take between *boundaries and connections*

- Jesus and the disciples cross a sea from Jewish to Gentile country—territories alien to each other

Warm air clashing with cold air—of course a storm breaks out.

But *Peace! Be Still!* Says Jesus, and they cross the boundary line to make a connection.

- No sooner do they land in Gentile territory, however, when they come upon a man  
who has a storm inside himself (this story, alas, the lectionary doesn’t let us hear).

The man’s name is *Legion*—the many parts of his personality are in violent civil war.

He’s divided against himself—he is literally, tearing himself apart

But this isn’t just a simple case of mental imbalance.

His name is *Legion*—A Roman Legion (thousands of soldiers) has invaded/occupied his country.

He is riven with Post Traumatic Stress.

Mark is clearly signaling the devastating human implications of military invasions.

Jesus calms this storm also—brings peace; but that freaks out the man’s fellow citizens

who now have no one onto whom they can project their own internal conflicts.

*Please leave,* they beg Jesus, *we want to maintain the boundaries, not connect across them.*

So back across the boundary waters Jesus goes again.

- But, back in his native country boundary issues erupt all over again.
    - Jairus, and an unnamed woman—both cross line/violate boundaries—because both are desperate
    - Jesus takes these invasions of social space, and turns them into invitations
      - Social boundaries become, for him personal and theological connecting points
      - These two touch him with faith; and he touches them with healing.
        - It is a healthy meeting space. *Good fences make good neighbors.*
        - These are not quick/overwhelming fixes: *Daughter, be healed—Give her something to eat*
        - Both represent the starting point of an extended process of social/spiritual reintegration.
        - There is a cost to this: Jesus becomes himself “unclean”—such boundary violations will cost his life.
- 4) Mark gives us a story, the writers of 1 Samuel give us a song: a heart-rending funeral lament. This doesn't have to do with boundaries and connections, does it?—Oh yes it does!
- Lot of water over dam: Saul's boundaries threatened by David's attempts to connect with him
  - Saul tries to kill David several times, and several times David saves Saul's life.
  - Jonathan—Saul's son and David's soul mate—tries to talk some sense into his dad;
    - But Saul (like the man in Mark's Gospel story) is at war with himself
  - Eventually both Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle.
    - Everyone expects David to do a victory dance on his grave—now he'll be king-YESSS.
    - NO! David leads his people in mourning the very one who has tried so hard to do him in.
  - How is this possible? How can David weep for a rival who has shut him out and sought his life?
    - Well, Jonathan has reached across bloodlines to establish connection with David.
    - And Jonathan's connection with David gives David energy to remain a neighbor to Saul.
- 5) St. Paul is doing a fund-raising campaign with the Corinthian church, not a story or a song, but a sales pitch Nothing about boundary issues and connection points there . . . Indeed there is!
- The Corinthian Church is rich, smart, and as mature as those kids in the back seat of the car.
    - (*I'm better than YOU, NO, I'M better than YOU!*)
    - Paul is the harried parent caught in the cross fire: only thing squabblers agree on: *Paul is bossy*
  - Paul wants to reconnect with him, and he wants them to reconnect with each other.
    - And his plan to pull that off involves getting them to become good neighbors with Christians in far off Jerusalem who are destitute because of a famine.
  - *Making connection with others is best way to make connections with yourselves and with me—pay up pledge!*
  - Easy for preacher Paul to say! No it isn't—he has his own boundary issues with the Jerusalem church.
    - But, like Jonathan and David with Saul—he refuses to let boundaries turn into barriers,
    - He uses them to make connections. He employs good fences to make good neighbors.
- 6) But how, exactly does Paul seek to make his case?
- *Jesus has reached across boundaries to make connections with you—draw on that energy.*
  - Not about size of gift, but about “Fair balance”—let's linger with that phrase
    - Tend to come to fairness with childish notions—*Your piece is bigger than my piece—Not Fair!*
      - Competition, compromise, comparative calculation (e.g debates over health cares, environment).
      - Different kind of comparison, different kind of calculation—{READ TEXT of 2 Cor. 8:13-14}
      - Mutual sharing of poverty and abundance—e.g. John Bosco.
- 7) You will remember that the title of Frost's poem is *Mending Wall*. Not breaching it or buttressing it; but mending it. God comes, again and again, to our broken walls and missed connections. And this day we touch God's fence mending work by joining in the give and take at God's own table.