



Marsha stands in front of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin. This only remaining original gate of the city has become a symbol of a reunified Germany.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18, NIV).

I grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, and, like everyone else, my growing up years had compelling seasons of history. I have vivid memories of key news stories that captured my imagination even if I didn't completely understand them. One such news story was in late 1989 when I was 14 years old. For several days in late November that year, a news story looped on our TV set (which had only two channels). The screen showed so many people crowded upon what looked to me like a very ugly wall. People were gathering in crowds that turned into mobs in the European city of Berlin. While I think of the history of the Second World War as being well before my time, this piece of political angst from that time remained until the end of the '80s. My only window into that scene was our family's 14-inch Toshiba television set. Everyone seemed overwhelmed and happy as that famous wall was taken down in both small pieces and large sections.

I have had the privilege of seeing a couple of important walls in the world. I stood on the Great Wall of China in Beijing a few years ago on a recruitment trip for the school

where I serve as principal. This past fall, I toured the city of Berlin (also on a recruitment trip) and saw a piece of that famous wall which divided the city from 1961 to 1989. On August 12, 1961, German soldiers began to erect barriers, topping them with barbed wire, down the middle of the city, dividing it into two parts, “east” and “west.” It happened

without warning, with much of the blockade being erected in the middle of the night. Berlin residents woke up on August 13, 1961, to a major division, ruled by communist forces in the east and America, Great Britain, and France in the west. There were no friendly arrangements or agreements for those who worked, had family, or friends on the other side of that wall.

The wall was built to maintain control and make a clear division. For 28 years it did just that. Over 140 people died trying to get across; hundreds of others made the attempt. Germany lived out another season of difficult history.

When I toured Berlin, I found a lot of troubling twentieth century history was highlighted when I took a short bike tour around the city. Our guide stopped us at the site of the famed bunker where Hitler ended his life. As the city went into full combat (street by street) at the end of World War II, Hitler refused to surrender, believing supporting armies were on their way.

There is just a small sign to mark the site and our guide (who happened

to be Canadian) said the government does not want to make too much of this egregious part of history. She said that many go there to spit on what they perceive to be Hitler's grave. Not far from the bunker is the Holocaust Memorial which stretches for 19,000 square metres in the middle of the city. It stands as a solemn, quiet reminder of what happens when we let hatred and evil go unchecked in the human spirit. It was a lot to take in and process.

Since returning home, I have thought about that wall. It sometimes seems easy to put up divisions and barriers between us. We see it in families, in churches, and between friendships. I recently observed a family getting ready to split apart. Everyone looked so miserable, mom and dad with their backs to each other and the kids not knowing how to react. Long-term parishioners seem unable to get over the wall that sent them away from their churches over pandemic issues (both sides). The things that divide us can sneak up on us the way

they did in Berlin that warm August evening. Romans 12:18 reminds us to make peace a priority, in fact, Christian faith commands it. History has taught us what can happen when we build walls for the sake of division and control.

The young people in our lives look to us as the examples; are we showing them a path of peace within our churches? Our families? And our community?

Let's keep short accounts with our relationships. Remember: our kids' well-being depends on our living at peace with everyone.

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