

## Who Decides Who Belongs?

Cheryl Roth  
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So much of our life is caught up in worrying about whether we are on the inside or the outside of a group of people, or perhaps caught somewhere in between. I know a lot about this, as growing up, our family moved almost every year. I was constantly striving to make new friends and break into a social circle where it seemed I didn't belong.

This phenomenon is captured in a hilarious way in the movie "Meet the Parents." The prospective father-in-law is constantly provoking his daughter's

boyfriend to see if he deserves to be "in the circle of trust" of their family. Humor is created when we take a situation to its extreme conclusion. We are laughing at the ridiculousness of the circumstances but we are also laughing at ourselves because we recognize the hidden truth within the comedy.

The walls we erect between ourselves and others are at the root of the world's problems and a huge headache for God. We don't usually think about God in this way; as someone who has headaches but he surely must as he looks at the problems of humanity. Clearly, the world is not as God intended.

### Surrounded by boundaries

We are surrounded by walls and boundaries; by inner and outer circles. It came up this week in the news when a woman drew fire by her claim that she was African American. It's an interesting question. Who determines who belongs within a group? This question is not just a question of the moment but has been with us since the beginning. It was an issue in the first family.



Cain felt seriously left out and now his name is synonymous with anger and resentment. Maybe someone has even challenged you saying, "Hey you, how come you are so Cained out?" Cain felt that as long as Abel was around he would always be blocked from God's love. He maybe couldn't even articulate it, but that was at the root of his troubles. There seemed to be only one solution and we all know what that was.

Fast forward generations and you see the same thing at the time of Jesus. His disciples were always arguing about who would be part of the inner circle of trust. This is one of God's BIG headaches. You can read about it in Mark 10:35-39.

*"James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"*

They wanted to be "in" with Jesus but he responded "You don't know what you are asking for." The real question is what were they seeking? They wanted to be part of Jesus' inner circle. However, the journey to be on the inside is a never ending, unsuccessful quest when you have the wrong motivation.

It's like peeling away at an onion. You think you are on the inside only to discover there is another layer. There is a more important "in" crowd to belong to. But no layer is so far on the inside that it can confer on us the true value we are seeking in life. Every layer is just another distraction and we still feel unsatisfied. Why were the disciples so desperate?

### The more things change the more they stay the same

Jesus' life must have been really frustrating. He had so much to teach and give but people's hearts were limited and they were very much concerned with who was "in" and who was "out." In thinking about our own lives you might say, "The more things change the more they stay the same!"

This on-going struggle was revealed in a journey that Jesus made to the region of Tyre and Sidon. You can read out it in Matthew 15:2-28.

*“Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.” 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, “Send her away, because she keeps shouting[a] at us.” 24 But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25 But she came and began [b]to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” 26 And He answered and said, “It is not [c]good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” 27 But she said, “Yes, Lord; [d]but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” 28 Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed [e]at once.”*



This short paragraph is incredibly revealing. All of humanity’s limitations linger between the lines. You have to understand that Tyre and Sidon were the burbs no Jew wanted to live in. The people of Israel saw themselves as God’s chosen ones and weren’t predisposed to interact with people they deemed low-lifers. So, when a Canaanite had the audacity to approach Jesus with a request they implored Jesus to send her away. But this woman would not be stopped because she was advocating on behalf of her sick daughter.

We all know there is nothing more powerful and determined as a mother’s love. I know this to be true because of the work I have done with parents who have a child with a disability. They are dogged in their persistence to find healing and happiness for their child. I have the utmost respect for the incredible love and

fortitude that I have seen first-hand in the lives of so many families. If you want to see God’s love that is one place to look.

This woman is not put off by the efforts of Jesus’ disciples to get rid of her; she persists. She tries to win Jesus over by acknowledging him as a son of David. She knows what Jews believe and value. She’s desperate. Eventually, to the relief of the disciples, Jesus turns to her and says some pretty harsh words, “I came to the lost sheep of Israel.” The inference is “You are not in the circle of trust.” Ouch! I’m sure that in this confrontational moment Jesus was observing everyone to see how they reacted. The disciples were no doubt pumped. That’s right, get rid of the woman. She’s not only a Canaanite but a woman to boot!

To everyone’s amazement she has a come-back for Jesus. Maybe I have no value to you or anyone else. The Jews may look at us like dogs but even dogs get to eat the crumbs under the children’s table. Please, please save my daughter. It’s heart rending to hear the emotional tension in that conversation.

To the disciples’ surprise, Jesus turns around and affirms her “Woman, your faith is great. It shall be done as you wish.” This woman, whose name we may never know, understood her value. Her love for her child emboldened her to declare “I belong, my daughter belongs. We have a right to receive your love and grace.” Jesus respected her internal confidence and her sense of value as a child of God.

He must have shocked the narrow minded disciples when his actions clearly showed, yes indeed, she belonged. Each one of us has to be able to claim: I am your begotten son; I am your begotten daughter. My life matters. I belong in God’s circle of trust. When we have such confidence no matter our circumstances, God has to open his arms and heart to us. When we really feel we are part of God’s family walls no longer matter to us. We aren’t focused on who we can wall out. In the immortal words of New Hampshire’s Robert Frost “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”

### **Mending Wall by Robert Frost**

*Something there is that doesn’t love a wall....  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go....  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, “Good fences make good neighbors.”  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder*

*If I could put a notion in his head:  
 “Why do they make good neighbors? Isn’t it  
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
 Before I built a wall I’d ask to know  
 What I was walling in or walling out,  
 And to whom I was like to give offence.  
 Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”*

It’s a great poem – what are we walling in and walling out when we erect fences. The fourteenth Dalai Lama had something to say about this:

*“From the viewpoint of absolute truth, what we feel and experience in our ordinary daily life is all delusion. Of all the various delusions, the sense of discrimination between oneself and others is the worst form, as it creates nothing but unpleasantness for both sides. If we can realize and meditate on ultimate truth, it will cleanse our impurities of mind and thus eradicate the sense of discrimination. This will help to create true love for one another.” -- Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Buddhism)*

### Who decides?



I was confronted by the quandary of “them and us” as I stood on a hill top overlooking the border between the United States and Mexico. It was before the huge fences were erected. I couldn’t see where the USA ended and Mexico began. I wondered, who decided where the line was drawn and what God feels about that. Rev. Moon encouraged us to think outside the box:

*“From this time on, the definition of “my country” will need to expand. Although everyone has their home country where they were born and live, in a larger sense, the entire world that God, our Father, created is “my country.”*

What if we had such a big mind? It seems to me the Pope was encouraging us in this direction in the Encyclical he released this week regarding the environment and our responsibility as global citizens to care for it. He admonished us that we have to go beyond the boundary of our own nation in caring for the world.

### Highway to heaven



We need a global and inclusive mindset. To foster this, Rev. Moon talked about the idea of a Peace Highway, a road that would go around the world enabling people to cross continents and connect with each other. As part of that road or highway he envisioned a Peace King Tunnel that would transverse the Bering Straits. Russia recently picked up on this idea and is developing plans to build such a subterranean tunnel. To begin to substantialize the Peace Highway, this summer, a group of inspired bicyclists is

following part of the route up the West Coast.

We are all part of one world family. We are seeking a world of freedom, peace, unity and happiness. It’s not just about my personal freedom, peace, unity and happiness but rather the freedom, peace, and happiness of everyone in the universal family. The whole world is our family. When you arrive in heaven, you will not find people separated by national borders. People of all nationalities will be together. Rev Moon asked:

*“The question is – are you prepared to live that way? Do you have such a universal viewpoint that you can embrace all people from the past, present and future?”*

Our Heavenly Parent’s circle is huge. Everyone belongs. To live in such a place we have to enlarge our own hearts. Our community here is the practice ground where we learn to love everyone, even if they are a little bit weird. This is the blessing of community and why and we benefit from not bowling alone.