



## Longer Tables, Lower Fences - Reflections for Lent 2019

Week 5 – 7<sup>th</sup> April

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### Building fences

When being sent to a new appointment, one of the private prayers I pray is that the garden will be small and manageable! Unfortunately for my current appointment the answer was "no". And at the front of the manse was a very mature privet hedge, overhanging the pavement by a couple of feet, almost 4 feet wide and the same high. You came into the manse garden by a small gate. Note the past tense, because over my first year I tackled the hedge to such an extent that it is now a shadow of its former self! I also found that when the hedge was thick and overgrown it was a receptacle for dumping rubbish in and I even found a wallet (emptied of course). When I had finally got it down to a reasonable size the first thing I noticed was how welcoming the manse now looks. Before, the high hedge was a like a fortress, the message given to those approaching was "Do Not Enter." "Keep Out." "Private." Now I feel it says "Come in. Welcome."

Fences and hedges are there to define boundaries, make a statement, give us security, but they are not always tangible objects that we can touch and see. And we place invisible fences around ourselves if we have been hurt in any way in order to protect ourselves - or our attitudes and prejudices create other invisible fences that can keep folk out! We do need fences in our lives and being enfolded is a good feeling, Jesus even spoke of us being in the Sheepfold and that he was the Gate keeping us safe. In the Old Testament, when God was displeased with his chosen people one of ways the prophets declared God's displeasure was to tell them that their fences and hedges would be removed which then made them vulnerable to attack.

So it is not about having no fences, but the height and depth of the fences we erect could be where the challenge lies, and maybe the theme for our Lenten reflections of Lower Fences allows for people to come in and partake at the Longer Table?



**To ponder:** What fences do you erect around yourself? What fences does your church erect and how high are they? Does God have fences?

**Prayer:** Lord God, sometimes the prayer I want to pray to you is so hard to put into words, and on those days I ask that you will listen to the yearnings of my heart. I thank you for the fences that keep me enfolded in your love, but I ask that you break through the barriers I erect that stop your healing streams and light from flooding through me. And painful though it might be, challenge my attitudes and prejudices when they say "keep out, keep away" when it should be "welcome." Loving God, in Jesus you showed us that you welcome all who turn to you, help me to love as you love and see those around me through your eyes, and welcome them in your name. Amen.

**Bible link:** 2 Corinthians 12:12-18 (The Message)

**Hymn:** *Singing the Faith 648 'God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you, Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight; so may God grace you, heal and embrace you, lead you through darkness into the light.'*