

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/3/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Ever hear of the “Immovable Ladder?” I had the opportunity to see it in 2018. It really exists in Jerusalem outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Church contains the Edicule (the chapel around the rock on which JESUS was laid after the crucifixion, Golgotha (the rock where the cross on which JESUS died was erected), and the stone slab which marks the place where JESUS body was laid for preparation for burial. On a ledge above the doors to the Church, beneath a widow sits a wooden ladder that has been there since before 1757.

You see, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is shared by six different, very old Christian denominations. And they don't get along with each other. Each controls a portion of the interior of the Church. One oversees the entrance chamber to the Church, one the Edicule, one the top of Golgotha, one the bottom of Golgotha, one the stone of preparation, and one the small chapel which they have built on the backside of the Edicule. There is so much animosity between these six groups that nothing can be done in any common area without the unanimous agreement of all the groups (called the Status Quo).

Two hundred and sixty years ago, some repairs were being made to the Church. One of the construction workers left a simple wooden ladder behind on that ledge. To this day, the leaders of those six denominations refuse to agree on how to remove the ladder, so there it sits—the “Immovable Ladder.”

An additional story about the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. These six denominations were fighting so much over the keys to the front door several hundred years ago, that the Sultan ruling over Jerusalem at the time finally resolved the issue. He took the keys and gave them to a Muslim family that lives next door to the Church. To this day, that family opens and closes the door each day so that visitors may enter to see this most holy site in Christendom.

It seems to me that this is such a clear and revealing metaphor for the Christian Church and its many different denominations. We are so busy trying to control things and claim our own territory and refusing to seek common ground and agreement on even the smallest issues. Instead of working together to make CHRIST available to all, we fight over who can come in and who can't and on what basis. The early Christians were focused on sharing the love of JESUS and the glorious story of the resurrection with everyone. Though there were disagreements and occasions where some few disrupted the growth and inclusion of the new believers, the early Christians were about making CHRIST available to everyone. It is a goal toward which we should be working even today.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey