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The 2012 Summer Olympic Games begin this Friday, and so I thought I would offer you a few trivia questions about the Olympics:

Q: Why isn't sun-tanning an Olympic sport?

A: Because the best you can ever get is bronze.

Q: Why did they send the Olympic judge out in search of the lost wedding ring?

A: Because he was a “medal detector.”

Q: Why does the Olympic torch always start in Olympia?

A: Because it's hard to put out a “Greece fire.”

On a more serious note, it's been said that when the original Greeks held these competitions between various city-states and kingdoms, which has been a tradition dating back to 776 years before Christ was born, that all conflicts were postponed until the end of the games. The city-states agreed to allow safe passage to the Games for all athletes, even the participants of their enemies. And although the geographical area of participants thousands of years ago was much smaller than today, wouldn't it be amazing if we could follow their example now and put aside all conflicts around the world though the end of the games on August 12?

Last fall Britain wanted to encourage such an idea by reminding the world of this ancient practice of safe passage to the Games. They were able to get all 193 members of the United Nations to sign a resolution calling for the Olympic Truce.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with our families and communities, what if we made a decision to uphold such a truce? What if we could pledge to not argue for two weeks? What if no one had a conflict in our jobs until the end of the Olympics? What if all corruption came to a halt? And even better, what if our nations actually stopped fighting for two whole weeks? Just imagine how our world might be changed. Who knows—we might like the change so much that we decide to live that way even more than two weeks!

The idea of coming together in peace is even represented in the famous Olympic symbol of the five colored rings, a logo created in 1912 to represent the five parts of the world. The five colors represented all the colors that appeared in all the national flags at that time. The interlaced rings represent our common humanity, bound together as one, just as wedding rings represent the intertwining of a couple's lives. The five

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Olympic rings have been appearing throughout London as people are preparing for this summer's event.

I think that if this symbol had been around 2000 years ago, the apostle Paul may have been proud to display it, for in his letter to the churches in the area of Ephesus, he emphasized some of the values represented by the five circles. Some scholars suggest that Paul wrote this letter from prison, but rather than complaining, he encouraged members of the church to see themselves as one. In the midst of his own imprisonment, he offered words of hope. He reminded some of his readers that they had once been outsiders, for they were Gentiles, people who were not part of the inner religious movement of the day. Paul reminded them that they were at one time separated from Christ—aliens and strangers, having no hope and without God. They were the “other”—not included in the circle of life and hope.

But in his letter, Paul reminds them how Christ brought them into the circle. Though the terrible death of Christ on the cross could have pushed us farther away from God, Paul suggested that somehow through Christ's death we have been made one with God, that hostility has ended. That's hard to understand, isn't it? For if God had sent Jesus into the world as a symbol of

hope, as a way of spreading God's love, and we humans killed him, it seems as though God could have given up on us. God could have said, “Forget it. I've helped these people escape from oppression. I've sent prophets. I've provided food and other blessings. I even sent Jesus whom I consider like a son, and what thanks do I get? They killed him!”

Even in prison, where Paul could have been discouraged, he knew God would never give up on us, and he wrote that the walls that could have separated us from God and one another have been broken, making us all members of the same family. In spite of the violent death that Jesus endured, God amazingly continued to embrace humanity and offer the hope of a new life.

As I was writing these thoughts in preparation for this morning, I had intended to now reflect with you about how walls still separate us today, such as the walls of racism, political issues, sexual orientation, and a whole lot other walls. I was then going to invite you to help name other walls that separate us. You could probably name the kinds of walls we build that prevent us from truly getting to know one another, and then I was going to think about how we can tear down these walls that keep us apart and how we could build a

foundation with Christ as the cornerstone, as Paul suggested in his letter.

But then I heard a breaking news story about events that occurred early Friday morning in a movie theater in Colorado, and suddenly my thoughts shifted in another direction. Rather than seeing the walls that divide us, I began to reflect on how walls can protect us, and Paul's words about breaking down walls began to sound a bit out of place. Those who attended the opening night of the Dark Knight Batman movie in Aurora, Colorado early Friday morning surely must have appreciated the walls that protected them as they ran out of the theater when a 24-year-old man came into the theater wearing a gas mask and threw a gas canister into the room. At first movie goers thought it was part of the special effects for the movie until he opened fire, shooting 71 people, twelve of whom were killed.<sup>3</sup> Walls did not even protect those in the theater next door as bullets tore through the walls.

Those of us hearing this story from a distance wonder: *Why does such violence occur? Where was God in all this? What do we do in response to such an event?* The Internet has been filled with responses to this latest tragic event, from parents becoming more concerned

about how to protect their children in what they had considered a "safe" place, to others suggesting that we have too lax of gun regulations in our country. Some movie theaters have cancelled their opening premiers of this particular movie. Other theaters have prohibited the wearing of costumes to the movie since the gunman wore a gas mask similar to a character in the movie, and officials at first thought he went unnoticed and purchased a ticket while in costume.

Two thousand years ago, Paul was no stranger to violence. He didn't have a rose-colored-glasses view of the world, for he knew of the tragic death of Jesus at the hands of the Roman Empire. He knew firsthand the violence of a system that would imprison Paul himself behind stone walls for trying to bring hope to a violent world.

Where is God in all this? God is in the midst of the chaos, feeling the fear of those who faced the trauma of Christ's death and the terror this weekend in a movie theater. Sometimes lives go awry, spinning off in a direction that makes no sense. Sometimes even the forces of nature create chaos and destruction. Sometimes we find ourselves in the middle of

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unpredictable and terrifying events and we wonder,  
*Where is God?*

God is there, in the midst of the chaos, offering the path of hope, for even in the violence of Paul's day, and in spite of the walls that separate us, he could still write later in his letter

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (4:31-32).

So what do we do? In light of the tragic events of this weekend, maybe we could each strive to break the walls of violence, beginning in our own lives. Let's begin during the two weeks of the Olympics, offering safe passage to everyone who is part of our day. As we tear down the walls of violence, let's instead build one family of compassion as we continue to trust that we are united through the hope that God continues to build in our world, building on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homiletics*, July 2012, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Plett, "London 2012: Britain sets Olympic record for UN truce call," October 17, 2011, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15345013](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15345013)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Peipert and P. Solomon Banda, "James Holmes, Aurora Shooting Suspect, In Custody After Shootings In Colorado Theater," 7/20/12, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/20/james-holmes-aurora-shooting-medical-student\\_n\\_1689794.html#116\\_ap-holmes-not-cooperating](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/20/james-holmes-aurora-shooting-medical-student_n_1689794.html#116_ap-holmes-not-cooperating)