

Paul speaks to the Galatians on the change which has occurred in their lives "now that faith has come." We are reminded that, because of the work of God in Christ, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, we are given a home, a place in the kingdom of God. We belong.

**Galatians 3:23-29** Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

## Reflections

### Belonging and Individuality

Many people wrangle with wanting to belong and wanting to maintain individuality. A significant cultural development has been the evolution of individuality. We to maintain a strong sense of self. Our sense of the spiritual may reflect this, too. Many talk about faith as a private, personal experience. Frequently it is. We can meet God alone in prayer. But, if we can love Christ on our own, why is belonging to a Christian community important?

We come to know Christ through others. In Christian community we find support to do his work. After Jesus' Resurrection, the Holy Spirit swept through locked doors and windows into the midst of the frightened apostles. This event, known as Pentecost, marks the beginning of the Church. The Holy Spirit unites us through faith, and as such, Jesus lives among us. Theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, tells us that Christ exists as a community of believers. Matthew expresses how Jesus remains among us: "whenever two or more of you gather in my name, I am there" (Matt. 18:20). The power in community is the Holy Spirit moving us to follow Christ. Praying and working together in Jesus' name we activate the

potential of God's will for us. Jesus has called all of us to join him.

The Gospels recount Jesus working with all kinds of people, nobles to outcasts. He lived a life of inclusion and tolerance. He crossed deep social divides to reach as many people as would listen. Jesus confronted people whose religious focus was to segregate others, keeping those they esteemed as holy from those whom they judged as unclean. Christ destroyed

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these barriers, rendering them irrelevant by demonstrating God's forgiveness and mercy. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes that "[w]hen God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brethren... God taught us to meet one another as God has met us in Christ." To be Christian is to be inclusive and included.

Time spent alone and in community deepens our relationship with Jesus and others. Yet, some of us resist joining. We may want to practice our faith alone to avoid the small moments of friction and inconveniences we inevitably experience in groups. But, if we want to encounter Christ, living now in the world and in us, we must risk getting outside of ourselves and answer his invitation to belong. By resisting community, we rob ourselves of connections that encourage spiritual growth. We mature spiritually in communion with others. Spiritual life, like the intellect and the psyche, is strengthened through introspection and interaction. The Christian community nurtures our faith as individuals and as members of the body of Christ.

— Sylvia Karman



### References:

*The Church as Community*, [www.elca.org/windowsoffaith/church4.html](http://www.elca.org/windowsoffaith/church4.html)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein. (New York: Harper & Row, 1954)

## Readings

*Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).*

### **Sunday, June 24**

Galatians 3:23-29

Paul tells the Galatians that they are united in their faith. What effect does being “in Christ” have on the relationships among believers?

### **Monday, June 25**

Acts 17:26-27

God made every nation and determined when and where we should live so that we may do his work. What needs do you see in our faith community and beyond that needs to be addressed? What do you think God is calling you to do?

### **Tuesday, June 26**

Psalms 133:1

How does the unity of our Christian community serve you, your family, and others? How does it serve God?

### **Wednesday, June 27**

Colossians 3:12-14

The apostle Paul instructs the Colossians on how they should behave as members of the Christian community. According to the verses, how should we “clothe” ourselves? What virtue binds us together? How are we to grow spiritually?

### **Thursday, June 28**

Acts 4:32-37

What are you most likely to share: your time, your money, your heart? What does church mean to you? That is, is it a place, a weekly activity, or a form of extended family? What would you like it to be, and what do you need to do to bring about that vision?

### **Friday, June 29**

1 Corinthians 3:1-22

What issues do you think are most likely to cause division within a church? What does this passage tell us about the characteristics of a worldly versus a spiritual people?

### **Saturday, June 30**

Philippians 2:1-11

To remain united in Christ, we are called in this passage to imitate Christ's humility. How can humility ensure the spiritual health of a church? What do you feel you are called to do or to change? How do you balance meeting the needs of others with meeting your own needs?