

One in Jesus Christ
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Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

The church in Galatia was suffering from dissension bred by the belief by some that Gentiles, non-Jews, needed to follow at least some of the laws which Jews followed, in order to be true Christians, and the belief by others that no such rules were necessary. The topic was an extremely heated one, deepening the already wide division between Jews and Gentiles. Ideas of superiority were pervasive on both sides and the church was looking for a declaration that one side was the right one, with each side hoping, of course, that it was their side that would be declared correct, as that would seal that side's status as superior. Does any of this feel familiar to you?

And what does Paul say? Paul who was of the belief that no such rules were necessary? Paul speaks to unity, unity in Christ, the one who brought them together in the first place. Paul reminds them **why** they are church, why they became church in the first place. And, in Christ, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female," for they are all "one in Christ Jesus." Paul doesn't call for them to pretend there are no differences between them, nor does he call for them to stop struggling with difficult topics. Instead, he reminds them that foundational to all of their work as community is the common ground they share in Christ.

One commentator likened the situation in Galatia to a town hall style meeting in his denomination around a challenging topic, about which he said, "I understood clearly that

many were angry, others were sad, and still others were scared. Some experienced all of these emotions at once. This mélange of feelings created a crucible within which real dialogue would prove difficult, if not impossible.”¹ Reading this I found it helpful to refresh my memory on the definition of a crucible. Merriam-Webster defines a crucible as “a place or situation that forces people to change or make a difficult decision.”²

In our nation, many are angry, others are sad, and still others are scared; some are experiencing all three emotions at once. And we are certainly in a situation that forces us to make a difficult decision. We are divided by our own thoughtful reflections, convictions, and understandings of what is right. Our wrestling with these thoughts, and with the issues prompting these thoughts, raises feelings of anger, sadness, and fear, among many others, and these feelings will only deepen for many on Tuesday. Anger, sadness, and fear will grow for some, while relief, and maybe even joy, will replace them for others. And we, like those in Galatia, may succumb to notions of superiority if the vote goes the way we hope it will.

The letter to the Galatians does more than caution us against such superior thoughts - it implores us as followers of Christ to forgo such thinking. We are, above our political parties, above our shared national citizenship, one in Christ. Months before his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians³ which reminded **that** gathered church that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”⁴ Tuesday, as much as today, we are called to remember that some are suffering as much as some are rejoicing.

Tuesday, as much as today, there is no longer Republican, Democratic, Libertarian, or Green party. There is no longer “other” for we are all one in Christ. The unity which campaigns have sought to tear apart remains. Our common ground is Christ. There are differences between us, for that is how we were created, different and yet same in the image of God. We will still need to struggle with difficult topics. Difficult topics. Not difficult

¹ Professor and Pastor J. William Harkins, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 160.

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crucible>

³ Recent scholarship suggests that Galatians was written in the fall of 53 CE, while the first letter to the Corinthians was written in the spring of 53 CE.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:26.

people. Difficult topics. And we will need to struggle through them, but **always** as a people unified in Christ.

Back in 1983, the two largest Presbyterian denominations reunited and, in recognition of this significant moment in history, a confession was drafted and called *A Brief Statement of Faith*. As the preface to the confession states, “it celebrates our rediscovery that for all our undoubted diversity, we are bound together by a common faith and a common task.”⁵ We are so clearly family within these walls; let this confession help us each to hold fast to the truth that those outside our walls are just as much family Tuesday, as much as today and every day after.

Let us pray together, with the prayer that is our confession, the Brief Statement of Faith:

In life and in death we belong to God.

Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit,

we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,

whom alone we worship and serve.

We trust in Jesus Christ,

fully human, fully God.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

preaching good news to the poor

and release to the captives,

teaching by word and deed

and blessing the children,

healing the sick

⁵ *Book of Confessions 2014*, pp. 301-302.

and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.

We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments.
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people

to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.
The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.