

Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

May 16, 2021

Rev. Kelley L. Becker

Prelude

Welcome

Good morning! It is so good to be together! Thank you for being here in this online space. I am Rev. Kelley Becker, the Senior Minister of Disciples Christian Church and this Alex Rivera, our Director of Music Ministries. We are delighted you are here.

It is a privilege to welcome all of you, but especially you who are first time visitors. I hope you will find this a comfortable place to be. There are two rituals we do together each week. If you are worshipping at home, I invite you to find a candle and something to light it with so, in a moment, you can bring in the light to your worship space as we do the same here. And later, we will have communion and you are invited! We usually use grape juice and bread, but you can choose whatever you like.

Every week, we gather to celebrate that darkness cannot extinguish light, and to remember that love will always be more powerful than fear.

We gather to be reminded of what it means to be called people of God.

Let us bring in the Light.

(light candle)

This candle symbolizes God's presence and steadfast love in our homes, in our lives, and in our world. It reminds us that the light of God's love is not confined to a church building, it is everywhere.

Will you pray with me?

Holy One,

Your spirit is alive in this world, in our homes and in our hearts. Use this time to spark something new in each one of us. And may that something new bring us closer to who we were created to be. Amen.

Call to Worship

We are many,
from many places,
different faces,
different races,
yet we are one.

Some hopeful, some hopeless,
some cope well, some cope less.
Some sure and some doubt,
some whisper, some shout,
yet we are one.

Some with abundance,
Some with need,
Some who are generous
Some who wrestle with greed,
yet we are one.

Let us worship together.

Hymn

Prayer

Holy One,
We are a motley crew.
Thank you for the widely different types of people,

and expressions of faith, which constitute the ones gathered in this space.

Thank you for the ones who are most comfortable expressing their faith through traditional practices and ancient rituals.

Thank you for the ones who seem to follow Jesus among innumerable questions and doubts.

Thank you for the ones whose faith appears to be a profound, childlike simplicity, unhurried and unworried.

Thank you for the ones who say very little, yet whose faith is constantly renewed by a wordless awe in the presence of your over the top love.

Lover of diversity, God of all souls,
continue to give us the grace to treasure each other with all our uniqueness and to use these differences in caring for the diversity of people who share this time and season with us. Amen.

Hymn

#82 CP Make Us One

Scripture

3 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? ⁴Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

⁶Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” ⁷so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. ⁸And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the

Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.”⁹ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

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

Sermon

Every time I read Galatians and get to chapter 3, it reminds me of my own tendency to escalate when I write while I am frustrated or angry. Paul begins this chapter with, “You foolish Galatians!” The Contemporary English Bible translates it, “You irrational Galatians!” Either way, it’s pretty intense. It’s like the longer Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia got, the more frustrated he became, “...and another thing, and another thing.” You’ve done that before, right? You write someone an email, telling them exactly where they are going wrong in life and then, just before you hit send, “delete, delete, delete, delete...” Well, Paul did not hit delete!

Aside from showing us Paul’s frustration, these first few verses of today’s text don’t really say anything different than what we heard last week from Paul. The point he makes is still, Gentiles do not have to follow Jewish law to belong to the fledging Christian communities or to belong to God. Again, it is really important, especially amid the anti-Semitism alive in our world today, to recognize that Paul’s point was

not that Jewish law or Judaism itself was bad or wrong. His point was that Gentiles belonged to God too and they didn't have to be something they were not (Jewish) in order to be loved by God or to be part of what God was doing in the world.

At the end of today's reading, are written the most familiar words of this letter, and perhaps some of the most familiar in the New Testament, "There 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." For Paul, everyone who believed the right things about Jesus, belonged. Circumcision, adherence to dietary laws or any other Jewish law was not required. Believe and you belong! How does that sound to you? To my progressive Christian ears, this doesn't sound so inclusive, partially because I don't believe what many Christians believe are the right things. Truthfully, in many Christian churches, I would not belong.

And not belonging doesn't feel good, even ministers are reminded of that sometimes. A friend told me a helpful story about how he was reminded of what it feels like not to belong. About 15 years ago, his brother-in-law died, so he and his wife and daughter made plans to fly to their hometown to be with family. Before they left home, his sister-in-law called and asked if he would officiate the funeral, which he agreed to do. His sister-in-law told him that, because Craig was a casual guy, the family wanted the service to be very informal. So, he chose to leave his clerical robe and stole at home, which was nice because these robes wrinkle very easily. In keeping with the wishes communicated to him, on the day of the service, my friend wore jeans and a short-sleeved shirt. When he walked into the chapel, he was shocked. The whole family was dressed up. His nephews had on suits and ties. His sister-in-law was wearing a beautiful gown with a string of pearls around her neck. When my friend told me this story, he said, "I honestly felt like I didn't belong...and I was the preacher."

He still remembers this clearly a full 15 years after it happened because he felt so uncomfortable, and that experience was just about what he was wearing. There are a million other reasons that people feel like they don't belong in churches, most of them not as easy to change as the clothes we wear. If Paul were here today, he might say to the Christian churches in the United States, "In the midst of complex immigration controversies, there is neither native born nor illegal immigrant. In a society dramatically divided by income, there is neither moneyed nor working class nor poor. In a season of intense political division, there is neither Republican nor Democrat nor Independent." Paul didn't think there was anything about any of us more important than what we believe about Jesus.

Unfortunately, some churches who would say they agree with Paul haven't lived that out very well. You may have read that Saddleback Christian Church, a megachurch in California, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church, ordained three women last week. In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the denomination DCC is affiliated with, ordaining women isn't unusual. It happens all the time. But for a Southern Baptist Church to do that, it's a big deal. In response to this news, J.D. Greear, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, "Saddleback Church's decision to ordain three women was 'disappointing,' and urged the denomination to "stand on the bedrock of God's Word — whether the issue is the role of pastor or any other issue." Coincidentally, often the "bedrock of God's word" churches use to argue their case against ordaining women is words attributed to Paul, like in 1 Corinthians 14 where the text says, "...women should be silent in the church..." Incidentally, some scholars think that was added later and was never Paul's to begin with. But even if it was Paul's, that doesn't sound very Jesus-y, does it? And it certainly doesn't sound like something churches would want to say if they really want women (literally half the population) to feel a sense of belonging in the church. Interpretation and context matter.

But what Paul told the Galatians is that it is belief in Jesus alone that matters. Paul taught that, as Christians, we find our unity, focus, and our very being in Jesus. It is that common belief, according to Paul, on which our belonging rests, our belonging to God and our belonging to the church. We believe and then we belong. Is that what happened for you? Did you believe before you belonged?

In a surprise to no one, I disagree with Paul. I think belonging comes before believing. Here's why: You see, most people don't have an apocalyptic moment like Paul did. Most people don't encounter a flash of light from heaven and hear the voice of Jesus while they are walking along a road. There isn't a single spectacular experience that sparks our faith. In fact, most of us encounter our faith through our encounters with other people, by belonging to and with other people. I know about the ways of Jesus and the love of God because other people have shown me. And truthfully, some of the people who have shown me Jesus' ways don't even claim to be Christians. And sadly, on the other hand, some people who claim to be Christians have a really difficult time showing the world God's love. My faith journey has taught me that very often we belong before we believe.

God calls us to gather people. And this letter we've looked at for the last couple of weeks reminds us that, in every time, part of the challenge for God's people is to figure out who isn't gathered and why. In Paul's day, the Gentiles had been left far outside of who was considered God's people. Jesus and the stories of Jesus gathered them and gave them something of their own to believe and a place to belong. Today, we are called to seek the ones on the outside and invite them in, not to join us and do what we have always done, but to create something new together. We don't need to be, and shouldn't try to be, a 1st century church, like the church in Galatia. We can never be, and shouldn't want to be a church from the 1960s that is bursting at the seams, even though that's when this church began. We need to be a

church for today, a church that is colorful and joyful; a church that knows belonging and being together is more important than everyone believing the same things about Jesus and a church that is willing to be changed so that the world might be changed too.

Next week, we will celebrate Pentecost. Since Easter, we've been talking about how God's spirit loose in the world. The Pentecost story is a fabulous, colorful story of the followers of Jesus' first awareness of God's spirit. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, Church with a capital C. It's the day we celebrate that, after more than 2000 years, one of the ways God chooses to reveal Godself to the world is through Christian community. And you are invited to come and see what God is up to! Amen.

Hymn

Communion

At Disciples Christian Church, communion is open to everyone, whether we are worshiping in person or virtually. You don't have to pretend you believe things you aren't sure about or be a member of the church. No matter who you are, what you have said or done, if you seek to love and be loved, you are welcome at this table where every week we remember the story of the last night Jesus spent with his friends. That night, they gathered around a table for a meal.

All these years later, we gather around this table to get a glimpse of that moment. For when we do, we remember that God welcomes all of us and there is a place set for every one of us. At the table, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and broke it. He gave some to all of them and there was enough for everyone. He took the cup, blessed it, and passed it around, and again, there was enough for everyone. Let us pray.
Holy One,

Use this bread and juice to draw us together around your love and your abundance. In this ancient tradition, show us that we belong to you and to each other. Hear us now as we pray together:

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Communion Video

Building the Community (announcements)

Love in a Pantry

Patty Taylor’s Memorial Service Friday, May 21st, 11:00 am, lunch to follow

May 23rd- Next week, Sunday, May 23rd, we will move back to in-person worship in the sanctuary. When we return to the sanctuary, we will wear masks and practice social distancing. If you are not comfortable being here in-person yet or if you worship with us long distance, please note that we will still broadcast online. As always, I ask for your patience as we transition and work out the kinks in our plan. Our fervent hope is that, once we are not moving equipment outside every week, everything will come off slick as a whistle. Please stay tuned...literally.

Pentecost Offering-new churches!

Please don’t forget to give to the church by either going to the church website (www.dccbville.org) and clicking “Give” on the homepage, dropping a check in the mail, or if you are worshipping here in person,

you can drop a check in the offering box. Thank you for trusting us with your gifts.

Benediction

Hymn

Postlude