

A Small World

World Communion Sunday - October 3, 2021

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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. 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

For the weeks after my surgery my world narrowed: to my bedroom, then to main floor of the house.

My bandwidth narrowed: Afghanistan fell, Haiti had an earthquake, COVID deaths are still rising and politics is making things worse but I can still barely take it in.

My world became quite small.

COVID 19 narrowed many of our lives to our workspaces, to the length and breadth of our homes, to the care and comfort of our household.

We have lots of new babies in this congregation and for new parents, the world gets very focused on this tiny creature's needs.

It can be a relief, a respite, to focus on the near, on the dear, to care for ourselves, and our households, to let the locus of faith be our home and we all know how hard it is to be a Christian in our own homes or among those closest to us.

Early church life was centered in homes. First for safety then because they had no buildings

Today in our passage we hear about the church in Galatia, Jewish believers and Gentile believers gathered in different homes, each community loving and caring for one another but quite separate.

And that wouldn't have been problematic but there was a question of status. Surely the law said that those born Gentile were not yet fully part of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah's people.

Surely they had to follow the religious laws to be equals in the sight of the Lord.

In some early church communities, particularly in Corinth, there were wealthy believers who could invite many into their homes, both the rich and the poor, for the Lord's supper.

But they did so in the approved custom of Corinth, so the houseowner invited wealthier Christians were in one space and the poor believers, among them those who were debtors, were in a separate space in the same house and fed food and drink inferior to that of the brothers and sisters in the other room.

For Paul, the segregation, the ranking, the unequal fellowship was the culture of the world and the old laws of the faith creeping into the community of Jesus.

The Lord's supper, the common meal, is the essence of the faith, one loaf, one body, uniting believers.

How can we not be equals before the table of the Lord?

He wrote the Galatians a letter, it is the oldest writing in our New Testament, the first preserved.

And these are the most important words in that letter: *there are neither male nor female, gentile or Jew, enslaved or free, but we are all one in Christ Jesus.* We may live in different households but we are one. We may speak different languages and have different family histories on this planet. We may be able to leap and run in body or mind and some of our bodies and minds may not.

Because of what we look like, or earn, or do for a living, or how our lives are turning out, we may not think ourselves to be equal, whole, beloved as others are or we may think that our small world is the only one that counts, that we aren't a piece of God's continent, a part of the main.

But all of you are one in Christ Jesus, says Paul.

²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Just take that in, for a moment. We are one in Christ. We belong to Christ, all of us, including those outside our small worlds.

Lately I have thought about this theory that there is just six degrees of separation between us and any other persons on the planet. That we know someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows that other person. That we know Fred and Allan and Susan means that we have less separation than that to those on the African continent. All of that is amazing.

But what Paul says is perhaps even more astounding that we are One with these others there is no separation we are in Christ and we belong to Christ.

We started practicing World Communion Sunday back in 1940, when the world was beginning to come apart again for the second time in that century. Because we had to remember, amidst all the conflict between cultures that we were one community of faith. That God so loved not this community or that one, but that God so loved the world.

The World!

I heard this week about a young man who was in the World Trade Center when the planes hit and he raced down from the 47th floor and survived, And he struggled after that because he was unable to get out of his mind the scene that he left behind—people of all ages, races, genders, nationalities praying, in languages he could not understand, in postures of prayer with which he was unfamiliar. All were praying to one God.

“He asked his pastor, ‘What am I to make of that?... Suddenly, my God was so narrow. As I was running down the stairs, I couldn’t help but think of the God who is claimed by all these people,’ he said.

A God who so loves the world, a rather small world in this big universe and gave us Jesus to love us into loving one another.

A friend of mine, the poet Julia Cadwalder Staub wrote this poem:

*There is no such thing as quantity in love
my mother said, correcting me.
No such thing as “much” love.
You can’t count it.
No such thing as “all my love.”
You can’t contain it.
Love expands.
There’s an endless supply.
I love you, she said.
That’s sufficient.*

"I love you," says Jesus,
"That's sufficient
and there's enough
for this whole world. "

Amen.