

Daily Devotional, July 6, 2020 And They'll Know We are Christians.....

“So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28 (GNT)

These are the Apostle Paul's words to the church in Galatia. At that time, there was much animosity among the various racial groups, as well as gender discrimination and societal position. The early church was up against many different fronts that were a part of life in those times: There was great lack in education, and the racial bigotry and gender bias compromised the wellbeing and survival of this new community. Imagine the disparities within these young groups of believers and the challenges each of them faced in holding these fledgling factions together.

There would be many struggles for power amidst their various national differences, not to mention the way women and slaves were denigrated to lesser roles. There would no doubt be feelings of superiority displayed by those who had been embedded in systems of privilege. Just try to wrap your head around a church that faced so many new variables in attempting to create a balanced playing field for all of its participants. What would life have been like in blending all of these disparate members into a loving partnership where at every turn, there would be some type of victimization that would take place by those who could not get over their particular ingrained sense of superiority? Actually, in many cases, this is yet the church of today.

How many varied Protestant denominations are there in today's world? Too many to count, separated by the same type of discriminatory problems that troubled the infant church. Add in the Orthodox branches, the Mormons, the Jehovah's, the Amish, and many other offshoots. In the Lutheran Church alone, how many branches are there in the world? I'm not even going to attempt that one. I'll leave that to the Lutheran World Federation to grapple with (along with those Lutheran bodies who are members and those who are not!). Regardless, unity is at the heart of any healthy church, and what is most important for every Christian to remember is that Christ is the glue that bonds us all together!

In the late 60's, I had a youth group leader who took a handful of us teens to an upstart Lutheran Church situated in the living room of an old mansion in the Hyde Park neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before. The worship leaders didn't wear robes or clerical collars, and the service didn't follow a strict liturgy. The music was played on acoustic guitars, alongside a few people who played around with different percussion instruments.

One of the songs that we sang was written to a simple little repetitious melody, but the lyrics of this song came back to me as I dwelled on this reflection of the early church. Although the tune is a bit tired, I believe that the words still carry some weight when we think about where we are at in our world today and how much significance these words still carry as we continue to strive for pure equality today. These are two of the four verses:

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will work with each other, we will work side by side
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

Peter Scholtes, 1968; 1966 F.E.L. Publications. Assigned 1991 Lorenz Publishing Company

“The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, So they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. John 17:21” (The Message)

Jesus prayed in this verse that all of His followers would all be one, in order that the world would be unified in the belief that He had been sent as the savior of all. There is power in unity, and there is a unity in diversity. We each have different identities and different purposes. We come from all different strata of humanity: every color under the sun, different genders and economic divisions, but we are one in Jesus Christ! Our belief in Jesus lifts us up beyond all real or imagined societal barriers and unifies us in spirit. There is no privilege or superiority over anyone else.

If we feel in any way indifferent to this reality, then we must repent of forcing any of these distinctions that our Lord has eliminated! Every follower of Jesus is an heir to God’s kingdom, and there is not one person more honored than another. When we allow differences to separate us, we are in opposition to God. Instead, it is God’s will that we be more purposeful in pursuing those who are different from us and developing relationships of trust and love through the unity we have found in Jesus. When we seek and honor these connections, it is then that the world will know we are Christians by our love!

Prayer: All praise to the Father, from whom all things come; And all praise to Christ Jesus, His only Son. And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one. Lord, help us to be known to all by Your love. Help us to be more intentional in reach out in unity to every person we encounter. Amen.