

**Clothed in Christ**  
**ELCA Churchwide Assembly**  
**Thursday, August 9**  
**Galatians 3:15-29**

Thank you all for your active participation in the Bible study yesterday. You are dwelling in the Word, discerning the Spirit, and beginning to deliberate the questions, exactly as the people of God. Can you see why we on the task force are so eager to draw from the deep wells of Christian wisdom and experience from all over the church? Imagine how rich our conversations and witness as a church will be as we allow ourselves to listen not as partisans on issues, but as forgiven sinners beloved by God. We have no illusions that the deliberations, debates, and decisions will be untroubled. Our Lord did not promise it would be easy for us, but He did promise to be present with us.

This is just where the Apostle Paul picks up today. He moves beyond contending with his adversaries to a profound vision of life in Christ Jesus. In the first portion he develops the contrast between a relationship based on a legal contract or obligation to a relationship built on promise or gift. Lawsuits are deadly in a family. Receiving family legacies by promise is a blessing to the world. So how do you hope to receive your birthright as God's child? By claiming your rights before God or as unmerited gift?

And the greatest promise, the richest gift we receive is the presence of the living Christ with us, among us, for us. In this letter Paul draws us into "the faith of Christ," "the love of Christ," and even "the law of Christ." He is, of course, encouraging our faith in Christ, our love for Jesus, and our obedience to our Lord. But he is also disclosing a deeper mystery. The faith

of Christ is truly *Christ's faithfulness to us*. The love of Christ is *Jesus' profound compassion* for frail mortals and love for sinners like us. And the law of Christ is fulfilled for us in *Christ's death on the cross*.

Have you thought about the simple table grace we teach our children? "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest!" Paul testifies that this is not a mere wish, but an invitation. The child's confidence is also right, "And let these gifts to us be blessed." But think about the gospel stories where Jesus came as guest and challenged the whole household. When you are arguing about sex with your children or your neighbors, be careful assuming Jesus is on your side. If you are on Jesus' side, you discover he brings tax collectors and sinners with him. And the blessing of the gifts didn't stop with your household. "These gifts to us" are blessed to be a blessing to the world God so loves.

Now listen for the central promise of this passage. The apostle says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." When Christ comes among us, he disturbs our righteousness. He draws us into his faith, his love, his law for the blessing of the world, sending us to care for the outcasts and to protect the most vulnerable.

My prayer, dear friends, is truly that the word of Christ may dwell in all of us richly. That we may truly be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, caught up in his bold, compassionate mission of love, inspired by his self-giving to the point of death. And what vision will the living Christ give us of the promise of our mortal, sexual lives for all for whom he died?

To move quickly into the reading, let me simply quote from the study material every congregation has already received. You can do this at home!

“Two brief insights may aid our listening to hear God’s word of promise for our lives.

1. *It’s all about the promises.* Paul’s rich and complicated history lesson scores the point that God began with the promise, then brought in the rules, and ultimately made it possible through Christ to live in the promise, and not by the rules. When are your relationships not just running by the rules, but alive with promise?
2. *It’s all about Christ Jesus.* The apostle’s conviction is that faith is not only that we believe, but that our trust in Jesus is the bond by which Christ’s own faithfulness comes alive in our lives. When have you sensed Christ living in your relationships?

A reading from the third chapter of Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia.

May the Word of God dwell in you richly.

<sup>15</sup> Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. <sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, "And to offsprings," as of many; but it says, "And to your offspring," that is, to one person, who is Christ.

<sup>17</sup> My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.<sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

<sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. <sup>20</sup> Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

<sup>21</sup> Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

<sup>22</sup> But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

<sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. <sup>27</sup> As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Questions to be posted on the screen to aid discernment:

1. When are your relationships not just running by the rules, but alive with promise?
2. When have you sensed Christ living in your relationships?