

Do you share these thoughts? Have you shared these thoughts? Church isn't the place for someone like me who is confused about faith. I disagree about some things with people who go to church. I have doubts; people at church have no doubts. I am so full of sin. I don't deserve to be at church. Church basically is for those who have their life together. There is no place in church for me. People around us share these feelings of inadequacy in regard to coming to church. It is easier to go our own way than to participate in creating new life together around Jesus Christ.

Looking at Galatians we are confident that faith in Jesus Christ can overcome our confusion and our disagreements with one another. God wants us to meet together to be encouraged and to encourage one another about faith. We meet together to be challenged and to challenge one another to live lives of love and service for Jesus Christ.

Another reason why it is not easy to make or sustain a commitment to join together with other Christians is that we may feel inadequate to join in Christian community. Joining Christian community is more than just attending church. It is being involved in what God is doing through the church.

The community of faith, the church is formed by and founded on God's faithfulness. This faithfulness goes back to God's promise to Abraham. I will be God to you and your offspring ...in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 17:7, 12:3). Most of us don't care what God said to Abraham. We can't understand how that promise could be real to us.

Paul the writer of Galatians is not going to let that be an excuse. Galatians 3:29 says, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. Our identification with Christ assures inclusion in this amazing promise. Galatians 3:26 "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

Christ's death for our salvation creates a new reality and joins us into a new family. Our identity moves from slaves or minors under the power of a custodian to life as heirs. The basis for our action moves from law to following Christ. Our relationships move from division and exclusiveness to 'all'(one in Christ.)

Apart from Jesus our identity (who we are) is based on what we control or what we are controlled by. We make something else god like work, an addiction, a particular interest. These gods end up enslaving us,

controlling what we do. They make things other than faith define us. This often results in disdain for God.

A way that we maintain control is by staying in the same position relative to God. We believe in God, but he is the one who does for us. When we do consider joining in ministry with God we become timid because he is so removed from us. We have no idea of how to relate to Him. We feel inadequate about joining Christian community (the church.)

A whole new understanding of self is open to us as we look to Jesus. This is confirmed by receiving the Spirit. Into the midst of our inadequacy God's sends the Spirit. Spirit makes God intimate not removed. Spirit confirms our new status as God's children, not once, but repeatedly. The Spirit gives us an actual experience of being a part of God's family deep within. When the Spirit is at work: prayer rises unbidden from hearts calling God Abba (Father).

As we receive the Spirit, we are not stripped of weakness and turned into spiritual giants. Yet we are no longer strangers, wandering wondering who cares or who knows them. We are no longer enslaved to other gods. Our identity is defined by a God who loves us as we are and who loves us so much he guides us into new life with others who know his love in Jesus Christ.

Apart from Jesus what we do determines our worth. Our actions often make us feel inadequate to join in Christian community. We look to God as a task master. We feel that we have to act a certain way to gain approval or we face punishment. It seems like we can never do enough. In church we don't know how we should act or don't want to act in some particular way the church asks us to. We make our own code or personal set of laws and live by them and judge ourselves and others by them.

"God sent his Son, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as children." Christian community and its actions are determined and shaped by Jesus Christ through those who believe in him. Our misperceptions of God, our fears about how we act are overcome in Christ Jesus. Our worth is established by what Jesus does. We come as we are and are baptized into Christ (filled by him); we are clothed with Christ (covered by him); we are one in Christ Jesus; we belong to Christ. Our inadequacy is taken on by Jesus and covered over as we follow him together.

Apart from Jesus relationships are based on categories we choose. We separate people into groups based on ethnicity, gender, economic means or social interests. We divide ourselves from people and exclude people if we determine that they are not worth our interest or time. We may feel

inadequate to join Christian community because we aren't like the people in the church financially; we don't have the same interests; we don't look the same.

“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.” We treat people differently, because Christ determines who the people of God are. Old distinctions cease to be relevant to our status before God, and before one another. The barriers that separate people into groups are overcome. Our reasons for gathering together in Christ aren't ethnic, gendered, socio-economic. Doesn't mean groups or barriers vanish, but superiority and inferiority between groups is destroyed. What had seemed to be an inadequacy is now recognized as a gift from God. Scraps of cloth are just that scraps, but when sewn together into a quilt the differences are blended into a unique beautiful creation. We are one in Christ, the spirit sews us together to share in all God has prepared for his children.

The Spirit of Jesus comes to confirm our adoption as sons and daughters of God. We each need to hear that we are a child of God, until we hear that, know that, believe that there is no hope to stay in community when there is confusion, disagreement, and feelings of inadequacy. Let us receive God's Spirit.

When we receive God's Spirit, we will join in community. We will engage in using our gifts or talents to form relationships and to minister alongside other Christians. We will no longer be focused on inadequacies, those of the church or our own inadequacies. We will not withdraw from the church completely or step back from involvement in the church.

We can put that into practice today as we vote on new leaders for our church community. Electing leaders does not make us lesser or give us freedom to be uninvolved in what God is doing in our church. Since we have come to know God and be known by God how can we turn back to our insecurities and lies about our worth or the worth of others that the spirits of this world have told us.

Let us affirm this in the words of the Declaration of Barmen one of the confessions that shapes our Presbyterian beliefs....Affirmation of Faith....