

Text: [Galatians 3:26-29 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: September 28, 2025

Title: "Us and Them"

Theme: The call to follow Jesus is a call to unity.

1

All of us feel like we're on the outside looking in sometimes

Did you ever hang out with a group of longtime friends – maybe
not YOUR friends but a friend's friends –

And even though they were nice enough

All the inside jokes made it clear you didn't really belong?

Or maybe you showed up at an event, having made an
assumption about the dress code

Only to find out everyone was much better dressed than you were
And all night...people had little comments to make about it

This may even happen in your own family

When you show up for Thanksgiving dinner

And people start talking politics

When you know 100% for sure you're the only one in the family
who votes the way you do

The experience of being on the outside is universal

We all have felt it

But some of us live with it more than others

If you look like me, then maybe you experience it less

Than someone whose skin is black or brown

Or someone whose accent gives them away as an immigrant to
this country

2

But the bottom line is that all of us want and need to belong
That's universal

And so we work hard to find and claim our people
We might actually lean into a label because it suits us – we're
proud of it
Maybe in high school you were a “theater kid” or a “jock” or
maybe you loved marching band

Your most-cherished connection might be based on language or
nationality or ethnicity
I hope to someday visit County Monaghan in Ireland
Monahan is the American pronunciation

Others might value where they went to school
Or a favorite baseball or football team

Kate has a Bills phone case and I am amazed at how many
people will see that in her hand and quietly say, “Go Bills”
Like some sort of secret handshake

But we also constantly see the ways that these identities can
calcify and transform
From something that's life-giving for us, something that helps us
find a sense of connection and belonging

Into something unhealthy – an us versus them
Where we use harsh words and begin looking at others with really
hard eyes
Skeptically, mistrustfully – even violently

I feel like this is where a lot of us are in our political affiliations
now
Just read the headlines
And you'll find violence by people of all political persuasions

Violence arises when we feel like we're facing an existential threat
That it's either me or you!
And that's how each side sees the other now

It's not going to be easy to walk that back to a calmer, more
considered place
Especially while politicians daily find novel ways to pour fuel on
the fire
Our sense of "us" versus "them" has seldom been this
pronounced

3

The early church was no stranger to that kind of division
Politics were heated then, as they are now

Many Jews were committed to the overthrow of Rome
And couldn't stand to see Roman soldiers in the sacred city of
Jerusalem

Within about 20 years of Paul's letter to the Galatians, there
would be an uprising and a war that would result in the
complete destruction of the Temple that Herod the Great
spent 40 years building up

And yet, Jesus' disciples included both Zealots – those fanatically
opposed to Rome –
And tax collectors – collaborators with Rome
In the gospels, he is often seen dining with tax collectors¹
And can be seen helping, and even commending the faith of
Roman soldiers²

This spirit of radical inclusion was something the early church fought hard to hold onto

Over the last two weeks, we've heard stories about an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8)

And a faithful Roman Centurion (Acts 10)

We talked about how both those stories illustrate the church's desire to reach beyond itself

And the tensions that arose even within the hearts of the most senior leaders, like Peter

God had to speak directly to him before he was ready to move with the Spirit

It turns out, it's not so easy to live as open-hearted as Jesus

The real flashpoint in the early church was the question of whether Gentiles could be Christians

Or whether this new faith was for Jews only

Paul, the author of Galatians, speaks very clearly in this famous passage about what he believes:

All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul gives us a powerful affirmation of one-ness

A surprising affirmation from someone who once hunted

Christians with the aim of stoning them to death

But who had a change of heart after meeting the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus

Paul worked hard for people to hear this message of one-ness
against resisters like Peter, who needed to have his own
conversion

Who – despite having walked with Jesus for years – still wanted
to divide the world into “us” and “them”

What I find most remarkable about these particular verses

There is neither Jew nor Greek

There is neither slave nor free

Nor is the male and female

For you are all one in Christ Jesus

Is that many scholars believe these lines originated not with Paul
But in the early baptismal liturgy of the Church

This was part of the words used at a baptism
Reminding believers that when they united with Christ
They also were uniting with each other
In a way that transcended all boundaries and divisions

Divisions of religion and ethnicity – neither Jew nor Greek
Divisions of status and class – neither slave nor free
Divisions of gender – male and female

What we learn from this is that baptism isn't a personal thing – it's
not just about me and Jesus
It's a communal thing – about me, Jesus, and everyone else who
has EVER made the decision to follow him

This is who we are
Because that's who Jesus was

It's not that our differences go away
Or that they no longer matter
It's just that we don't let them define who we are

Our NEW identity is that of belonging to CHRIST
And that's what defines us
The desire to LIVE LIKE JESUS – that's what defines us

4

This ONE-ness doesn't mean we don't stop paying attention to
the issues of justice in the world
That we stop caring about racism and sexism and homophobia
and xenophobia and transphobia
No – exactly the opposite
We care because we recognize that we are ONE
That we need each other, and that what affects one affects all

That there is, to quote another famous line of Paul's – ONE
BODY

“Though there are many of us, we are ONE BODY in Christ, and
individually we belong to each other.” (Romans 12:5)

Jesus didn't just teach that, he lived it
That's why he recruited Zealots and tax collectors

That's why he prayed from the cross:
“Father forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)
He taught us that we need to love our enemies
To pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44)
To DO GOOD, EVEN TO THOSE WHO HATE US (Luke 6:27)
THAT'S the gospel – anything else is not the gospel

Now I get it, that's not easy
It's not pleasant.

Why would Jesus demand this of us?
Well, don't you see?
It's so our enemies will no longer BE our enemies

A person you make the effort to pray for doesn't remain your
enemy forever
If they do, I'm going to go out on a limb and say:
You ain't praying right

5

Now, I recognize this feels difficult
Even weak

How can I continue to work for the good of those who are being
hurt by what's happening in the world
if I just unilaterally decide to disarm
and start praying for my enemies?
Won't it weaken my resolve and my commitment?

Well, did it weaken Jesus' commitment?

The only commitment prayer weakens is our commitment to
violence
And this deep-seated belief that retribution can solve our
problems

Prayer that leads to dialogue – that's our only way out
And so this week, I want you to make a list of people that you've
begun to think of as "enemies"
And to pray for them
Maybe just one at first, so you can stay really focused
Praying for an "enemy" may be more effective than praying for
"enemies" as a whole
Sometimes prayer needs to be really concrete

In your prayers, I want you to think about what they may need
What they may be going through
What they may be feeling
And lift them to God every day this week

Let's see what changes in us
Let's see if that us versus them divide gets a lot less stark

Because the call to follow Jesus isn't a call to choose a side
It's a call to unity
That transcends all the ways that humanity chooses to divide and
separate

No Jew nor Greek
No slave nor free
No male and female
We are all one in Christ Jesus

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ There are many references – Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 19:1-10.

² Matthew 8:5-13 & Luke 7:1-10.