

A friend who was adopted by his parents out of a foster home when he was very young told me that he always considered himself a very special person. He said, ***“My mother always told me, ‘Some children are just born into a family. You’re different. You’re special. We chose you. You are adopted!’ ”***

No wonder baptism is the sign of entry into the faith, a sign of our new life in Christ. God does not anywhere say to us, ***“Now if you do this and do that, then I will love you, save you, bring you home.”***

Rather, in Jesus Christ, God says to us, ***“I have come to you, have sought you out, have found you, so that I might bring you home, might make a place for you in my house, might set a place for you at my family’s table.”***

This is the great mystery of faith, the great good news. We’re all home. We’re all adopted. We all belong.

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

Christian community . . . is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship. . . . What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his or her spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1958, p. 20

*This sermon was preached by Rev Mark J Dunn at
St John’s Uniting Church
Cnr Mt Alexander Road and Buckley Street Essendon Victoria 3040
Home/Work Ph: 9375 1065 Mob: 0409 009 443
Email: mark@dunn.id.au
E-help: Rev William H. Willimon*

*www.stjohnsessendon.org.au
Enquiries about the Christian faith are always welcome.*



A Message from Mark! **You Belong!**

**20 June 2010 – Pentecost 4
Scripture: Galatians 3:23-29**

Theme *Just a few Sundays ago, in the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaimed that we would no longer be “orphans.” Now we are reminded that, because of the work of God in Christ, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, we are given a home, a place in the kingdom of God. We belong. We could not, of our own accord and by our own efforts, get right with God. God in Christ has made us right, saved us, justified us, set us right. Thanks be to God!*

“We make church membership much too easy,” said the critic. ***“A person can just stroll into a church and, with an absolute minimum of instruction or commitment, get his name put on the church roll. It’s too easy to join the church.”***

I disagree. From what I observe, sometimes, the most difficult thing in the world is to join a church. I’ve seen people show up and declare their intention to link with a congregation. At first, the congregation seems willing enough to have them join. The minister stands them up in front of everyone on a Sunday morning when they’re welcomed. Everyone smiles and seems pleased to have them in the congregation.

But then weeks later, after repeated attempts, the new member has not really become a member. No group was found that adopted her. She made no meaningful connections, despite repeated attempts.

A few months later, someone asks, ***“Whatever happened to that nice young woman who joined the church last April?”***

It can be difficult to join a church. Getting your name on the membership roll is easy. Belonging to the church is another matter. This is what we might call **“the problem of the backdoor.”** We’ve been doing pretty well when it comes to adding new members, sharing with people about what the church offers. They join, coming in the front door. But then, a few months later, some quietly exit out the back door. They joined, but they never really belonged.

Perhaps nobody ever joins a church. Perhaps the only way to get into a church; to belong to a church is to **be adopted**. Perhaps the only way to be a child of God is to **be adopted**.

Paul says as much in his letter to the church at Galatia: **“Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law. . . . But now that faith has come, . . . in Jesus Christ you are all children of God through faith. . . . 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. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise”** (Gal 3:23-29).

Paul is writing to a young church full of Jewish and Gentile Christians. To the Jews he speaks of their old life as **“imprisoned and guarded under the law.”** They had the law, with its lists of requirements and demands. That was the way they related to God, through the law. **“But now that faith has come”** Jews like Paul have discovered that they’re in a very different relationship with God. No longer are they subject to the judgment and discipline of the law.

They’re **“all children of God through faith.”** Those who once obeyed as if they were hired hands, servants, are now children of God.

What’s even more surprising is that Paul says to the Gentile Christians that they are now **“Abraham’s offspring.”** Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, the whole family of Israel. Through faith in Christ, even these non-Jewish outsiders, these Gentiles have become children of God, members of the family, inheritors of all that God has so graciously promised Israel. They have all been adopted into the family.

Our gospel reading reminds us that Jesus has an amazing power to calm and heal the most troubled and messed up of lives. What a wonderful offering which we are entrusted with as we minister to troubled souls today and help people come alive and discover who they really are.

Paul contrasts **“faith in Christ” and “the law.”** The law, as Paul sees it, is a human effort to get into God’s good books, to get right with God, to belong. How on earth could sinners like us expect to do that? You can’t work hard to become someone’s child. Imagine someone showing up on your front door saying, **“I’ve been checking out your family at work and play and think that you’re quite a nice group of people. I want to know what I need to do to get into your family.”**

You can’t do that. The only way to join a family is by being adopted. The only way to be beloved children in the family of God is through the adoptive expansive love of God in Christ.

Paul says that after what has happened in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, **“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”** (v. 28).

It is this very same ethic or truth which informs our racial and religious vilification laws today, and as we’ve seen with Malcolm Brown and Robert Dipierdomenico in footy this week, we still struggle to get it right.

I’ve been a Christian for as long as I can remember. I was brought to church as a baby. Yet even if you just joined this church and became a Christian last Sunday, I have nothing over you. Both of us are adopted. Neither of us have any claim, on our own, through our natural endowments or racial, gender, class characteristics, on the love of God.

All we have is our adoption. We belong, not on the basis of who we are or what we have done, but on the basis of God’s embrace of us. As Jesus said to his disciples on one occasion, **“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”**