

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 29, 2025

Faith, Okemos

I Kings 19:15-16, 19-21. Psalm 16, Galatians 5:1, 13-25[26], Luke 9:52-62

The apostle Paul wrote, *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Galatians 2:20

*...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me...*

[And these words from Paul's letter to the church in Rome:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death. So that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life...So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Romans 6:3-4, 11]

As I was preparing this week for a small group study of the life and writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I thought a lot about his vocation as a pastor in Germany in the 1930's and 40's, about his participation in the escalating resistance to Hitler's Nazi regime. Dietrich came to believe that Christ truly lived in him and that Christ Jesus living in him did battle with the forces of darkness within his own soul and within the soul of the nation he deeply loved.

My brothers and sisters, I believe that Jesus living in Dietrich also lives in now each of us. Know that in our restlessness and fear in this troubling time, Jesus is doing battle in and with us against our leanings toward despair and anxiety and cynicism, against our leanings toward

disgust and hatred of other sisters and brothers perhaps in all three branches of our government with whom we may have come to increasingly distrust and despise.

I think of the huge budget reconciliation bill now before Congress, a bill affecting countless of the poorest, the most vulnerable among us, a bill negatively affecting our efforts to conserve and preserve the Earth. Members of Congress and we whom they represent could easily give way to what St. Paul includes in what he calls “the works of the flesh”: heightened strife, anger, quarrels, dissensions, and factions.

But if it is really true that “it is no longer [we] who live, but rather Christ Jesus who lives in [us]”, then our hearts, our words, and our behaviors radically change. Then these beautiful words increasingly become who we are: people of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*.

But let us make no mistake: as long as we live in a fallen world, we remain vulnerable to speaking and acting badly, even in a congregation so full of love as this one we so cherish. In uncertain, stressful times we could can be nasty or at least indifferent to each other. We could hurt one another even if unintentionally, whether we are young or old, whether new or long-time members.

That was certainly true in the little church in Galatia. Harsh, ill-considered, judgmental words and behaviors toward one another threatened to irreparably break the bonds of love and kindness that held them together, wounds that effectively muted their witness to God’s mercy and grace.

The little church in Galatia and our congregation in Okemos, Michigan did have this in common: the same crucified and risen and healing Jesus Christ who lived in the Galatian congregation 2000 years later also

lives in us. They were then and we are now the very presence of Christ! Individually and collectively, we are called to be the very presence of Jesus in this time and in this community whenever our love for one another and for our neighbors especially in Meridian Township is clearly expressed.

But when these Galatian sisters and brothers sinned against each other, and if and when we sin against one another, this same indwelling God who spoke plainly and firmly in their hearts through this little letter to them from Paul, now speaks words of judgment plainly and firmly in our hearts. Christ Jesus dwelling in their hearts, this Jesus, through the Holy Spirit who convicted them of their sins, now truly dwelling in our hearts, will convict us of our sins against each other. But Jesus, the Son of God, gave them, and now will give us both the courage and the humility to repent, to put to death our pride and stubbornness, and to ask for forgiveness from those we have hurt.

It has been and it will be a wonderful thing to be part of a congregation where members can courageously acknowledge to one another their lack of kindness or patience or gentleness or self-control. It has been and it will be a wonderful thing when we can say to one another, "Please forgive me" and to hear back, "I forgive you." It is a wonderful thing when we regularly practice confession and forgiveness with one another! This practice may be the most primary, most powerful, deepest witness we can give to our own families, to our neighbors, to a country, to a world so divided, so full of hate.

Confession and forgiveness "levels the playing field." In it no one of us is either higher or lower than any of our siblings. Before God we are all sinners. And in Christ Jesus, we are all saints, truly cleansed and forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross for us. Until we reach our heavenly home heaven, we will always be both sinners who need to repent and saints who have been forgiven.

There is great freedom in this dual reality. We are set free from having to prove how good we are, how much better or better behaved we are than others, how surely “we are right” and “they are wrong.”

At the same time, we no longer need to wallow in guilt or remorse for how awful we are, for how badly and stubbornly wrong-headedly we’ve lived. Christ in our hearts continually sets us free! Jesus through the Holy Spirit struggles in us and with us and for us to name and dethrone the false gods that deceitfully promise a better, happier, safer life if we only we isolate ourselves, cut ourselves off from people with whom we disagree or whom we regard as beneath us.

I want to witness to our life in following Jesus, who is our Life, who day after day resides in our hearts, a life that keeps getting richer and richer. I want to share a little of what that was like in my own life this past week. Just days ago Janet Boyer was on my mind. I called her and rejoiced with her in her gratitude to God for still having her voice after major thyroid surgery performed dangerously close to her vocal cords. Then I think the same day, I was asked to see Jane and her daughter and some close friends. Jane, a member of Immanuel, Grand Ledge, was in hospice care, just hours away from her death. Together we prayed and hugged and commended Jane into God’s eternal embrace. Then I privileged to be with a developmentally disabled young man in jail who as I was leaving promised to pray for me as I for him. Then on Thursday evening Phylis and I were with a very crowded church in Grand Rapids, blessed by the presence of Nadia Bolz-Weber, a very down-to-earth, unpretentious ELCA pastor, who testified of the unending grace of God even in and from her mother’s womb, the grace of God through years of drug addiction, and to this day sharing the beautiful fruits of the Holy Spirit with countless people who were lost... Nadia sensing even in her darkest hours that Jesus was not far from her. She could echo the words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in

me.” With her we sang many songs that evening, songs including these two verses of Amazing Grace...

I believe that experiences like those given to in these last few days...expressions of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, given and received, are meant to be experienced by all of us, all of us in whom Jesus dwells, all of us whom Jesus calls to courageously follow him for the rest of our lives.

Please sing with me “Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song” [ELW 808]

Amen.

JDS