

## **Advent Devotional December 24, 2021**

### **Scripture**

Galatians 3:23-4:7

*3:23 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.*

*4:1 My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; <sup>2</sup>but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. <sup>3</sup>So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*

### **Devotional**

#### **Will Robbins '21**

Resist plucking the low-hanging hermeneutical fruit from this passage. There, in verse 3:28, we eye Paul's call for unity and quickly run to pulpit, street, or social media to offer peace to intra-Christian conflict. Yet we all know that these appeals for unity, the "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God" clarion calls, strike the same dissonant chord as one saying, "All lives matter." We know that society doesn't value all lives, just like we know that Christians aren't truly one, not in this age of political, racial, and denominational division. The truth is, difference still matters to us, just as Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female did for the Galatians.

Don't get me wrong. The pursuit for unity is an essential one for all followers of Jesus, yet might its achievement be possible through celebrating difference, not sameness? In what ways can we acknowledge, value, and honor differences that lead to unity? To do so seems counterintuitive, self-defeating, sort of like the idea of losing one's life in order to save it, or becoming great by becoming the least.

I want to suggest that Paul offers a path to such unity in this same letter. We might be tempted to dismiss Paul as pursuing unity through sameness in this passage, but later in this letter he reveals that true unity, the unity born of authentic love, comes only when we bear the unique burdens of another (Gal. 6:2). When we open ourselves to the suffering of another, we "fulfill the law of Christ" and ultimately become "a new creation" (Gal 6:2 and 6:15). That means we change, we become different, capable of loving our neighbor as ourselves (5:9), producing the fruit of the Spirit (5:22), and, this is key, not becoming the same as the one whom we are serving (5:15). Only then can we realize the mystery of becoming one in Christ Jesus (3:28).

The question is: what stories of suffering are you open to hearing?

**Prayer**

Dear God, who invites us to bear one another's burdens, may we come to faith in the example of Jesus Christ and achieve the unity that is possible only through him. Amen.