

Advent Lutheran Church  
One in Jesus  
June 1, 2025  
Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

I often find myself in conversations with people I'm just meeting or don't yet know very well. If they learn that I'm a pastor, I tend to lean into that part of my identity and begin sharing about Advent. For some people a mention that we are neighbors to the vacuum cleaner store on S. Cooper Street is all they need to hear. For others, they tune in more fully or tune out entirely when they hear that Advent is a Lutheran Church.

As Lutherans you all know Christianity through your lived experience and for most of you that is through a Lutheran lens. And, at the same time, you recognize that Christianity is bigger than any one denomination or tradition.

It makes sense that there are groups of denominations that are theologically more similar than others. For example, sociologists include the ELCA in a category known as Mainline Protestants. Alongside us are six other denominations:

- American Baptist
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Episcopal Church
- Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church

That's a lot to remember. You can relax as there will not be a quiz at the end of today's message.

Instead of going deeper with this list, I'd like to expand the list and make it much, much longer. Many of you know that my full-time ministry role is leading the White Rock Center of Hope – a ministry that feeds, clothes and empowers the East Dallas Community. We make this impact thanks to our primarily volunteer workforce.

This year we expect around 1,500 volunteers – including some from this congregation – to show up and help out. Most first learn of Hope through their local church then volunteer because they want to make a difference.

While we are grateful for the volunteers who come from the traditions I've named, the majority come from elsewhere. They come from congregations that are non-denominational, Pentecostal, and Evangelical and within each of those broad categories from many different denominations or networks.

This large group of people could not be more different. They are people with theological beliefs that would commonly be labeled as conservative or liberal as well as every point on that continuum. They are young and old and everything in between. They are male and female and non-binary. They lead affluent lives and live in poverty and are everywhere in between. To say it simply, Hope's volunteers are a diverse and improbable coalition.

This brings me to the verse in this morning's reading from the third chapter of Galatians that is likely the most familiar to you: verse 28. The version we heard read, the NIV, renders it as "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Hold on! If you read this verse in isolation – as if it is a billboard or a bumper sticker – it might sound like Paul is proclaiming that our differences have been erased in order that we can become one in Christ. I assure you that neither Paul nor anyone else is saying that in order to be united in Christ we have to give up our identities and become just like everyone else.

Instead, he is inviting us to consider what it means to be "one in Jesus." Paul is informing us that our new identity transcends divisions while affirming diversity, that our oneness is a function of unity not uniformity. This is anything but an invitation to cookie cutter or assembly line Christianity.

Placing this verse in its larger context we see that Paul is once again talking about the role of the law and the place of faith. Here

he tells us that before Jesus, the law acted as our guardian. That word choice is an okay translation, but its intended meaning doesn't hold up all that well across the centuries.

A modern translation renders it in way that makes explains it a bit more for the present: The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.<sup>1</sup>

New Testament Professor Carla Works explains that another word we might consider here is servant – a specific sort of servant. She writes:

The law is like the servant in the household who is responsible for the heir (3:24). This is a critical role, somewhere between a nanny and a custodian. This person must protect the heir at all costs, see to the heir's education and training, and accompany the heir always.

In a world where one's household is one's security, identity, and legacy, it is impossible to overstate the importance of such a task.

The law has a function—to direct people toward abundant life where everyone thrives.<sup>2</sup>

And, now, Christ has come. We are an Easter people! And because of this we are in direct relationship with God.<sup>3</sup>

In this morning's passage Paul explains that it all started in baptism. In baptism, we were clothed with Christ. This rich imagery is intended to invite multiple interpretations. In the early church, those who were baptized literally received new clothing – their white robes signified their new identity. And, at all times and in all places, baptism is the sacrament in which we are

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:24, The Message

<sup>2</sup> Carla Works. Commentary on Galatians 3:23-29, June 19, 2022, available from <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-12-3/commentary-on-galatians-323-29-5>

<sup>3</sup> Message rendering of Galatians 3:26

marked as Christ's own forever – in the baptismal waters we are given a new identity. Either way, know that in baptism you became part of Christ's family – part of the family of God. And, in so doing, you became an heir.

In Christ, we are all equal. We are all united in Jesus.

For most of us it is probably pretty easy to look around our sanctuary this morning and agree that we are one in Jesus. It takes a bit more effort if we expand this to include Adviento. And perhaps it becomes much more difficult yet just as appropriate to apply to the same label to the people who serve as volunteers at the White Rock Center of Hope.

All of them and all of us are one in Christ. When I finish preaching we will proclaim this truth together lifting our voices in song with *Somos Uno En Cristo* or *We are One in Christ*. It is a hymn that I was introduced to many years ago while on a mission trip in Mexico. And, on a day when we will gather here in this sacred space for the service or ordination and installation of Connie Ortega, it seems particularly appropriate to be reminded that our one faith is multi-lingual.

In English, the song begins with these words:

We are all one in Christ, we are one body.  
All one people out of many.<sup>4</sup>

I don't know about you, but I am grateful that God calls us – all of us – to bring all of ourselves to follow Jesus. In baptism God claims us as God's own. And, in community, we live out our faith.

Here at Advent we say we welcome everyone and we mean it.

- Those with varied religious, vocational, and familial backgrounds are welcome here.
- Those residing in gated communities, those with no place to lay their heads, and those housed in all sizes and sorts of dwellings are welcome here.

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<sup>4</sup> See ELW 643.

- Young people, old people, middle aged people, all people of all ages are welcome here.

I invite you to bring your whole self to Advent and to your journey of faith, knowing that the unique gifts, experiences, and perspectives you offer will enrich our community.

And as you do, it is my hope and prayer that you experience this congregation as a place where all are welcome and that you will intentionally extend that welcome to others.

May we truly be one in Jesus.

Amen.