

There is neither Jew nor Gentile

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all **one in Christ Jesus**. – Galatians 3:28*

My other congregation meets at the Good Shepherd Chapel at the Gardens at Warwick Forest, continuing a decades-long ministry that developed out of our congregation at Warwick River. Several people with ties to our congregation serve there, Kent Smith is there almost every Sunday. Until March, when the virus made it too dangerous to hold meetings, I had the honor once a month to speak to this wonderful group of mostly older people who are multiracial and multid denominational. Every Sunday morning, together in the same room, we have Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists of various persuasions, and who knows how many others.

We do not leave our various groups behind, other denominational ministers visit, and lay ministers from a Catholic group visit faithfully to allow participation in the weekly mass. Yet as we meet, we are also all Christians in the same room. We worship together. Those critical issues that divided us are (for the most part) left behind. Occasionally I end up in a great conversation if something I said doesn't fit a point of view, but so far, I've been forgiven. In that time and place, in that chapel, we celebrate the unity of Christ. What divides us is not as important as what unites us.

Often, we use Galatians 3:28 as the benediction for this group. Phrases such as these are recurrent in scripture (for example, [Col. 3:11](#), [1 Cor. 12:13](#)), and they must have been said by those in the early church with great wonder. The great divides are torn asunder.

Church historians tell us that the Gospel of Christ burst into a brutal Roman/Hellenic world, a cruel world, with a message that pulled people together. We see the early church struggle with the great divides, but they manage time and again to push them aside (Acts 6, for example).

Obviously, one thing that pulls us together in a care home is that many there are in the twilight of life with fading health. Under those circumstances, there is an understandable focusing of purpose.

I'm wondering if there is a similar focusing of purpose that may yet emerge from our current pandemic circumstances. There is reason to be scared. There is reason to reassure. There is reason to support each other.

While holding fast to our convictions and our callings, is this a time to focus on essentials, to lay aside, within us and between us, the differences that make no difference?

