

Inclusive: Who We Are and What We Do

Galatians 3: 23-29

Inclusive is who we are and what we do at church. It certainly is at this church—Crossroads. There is a sign out in front of the building that say, “ALL are welcome,” and we do capitalize the ALL!

The dictionary definition of inclusive is this: “comprehending stated limits or extremes (ex. Mon.—Fri. inclusive), broad in orientation or scope; covering or intended to cover all items, costs, or services.” How would you define inclusive? In a passionate letter to the Christians in the city of Galatia, the Apostle Paul gave us the clearest description of being inclusive as followers of Jesus. His writing rose to a level profound theological formation that makes him worthy of our attention and respect nearly 2000 years later.

Paul explained to the Galatians that faith had replaced the Jewish Law in terms of how people related to God and to each other. In that context, he seemed to see faith as the capacity to trust that God is and to act on that trust—that the faith journey is not about following a set of religious rules or practices, rather is a way of living and trusting in God’s love for us and all people, trusting that we are created to be full partners with God in the shaping of our own lives, our communities of faith, and even the entire world. This is essentially what Paul meant when he wrote, “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” (Gal. 3: 26)

Paul used a metaphor describing this faith: “[you who were] baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” You’ve had a *makeover* with a whole new wardrobe. The new *you* represented by those new clothes trusts and walks in the way of God that Jesus showed. A makeover brings a about dramatic change—even more with putting on Christ. This is a dramatic change in how you live. Paul wrote, “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.” At least when the community of faith gathered, the primary divisions among first-century Jews living in Roman society were not to be observed: divisions between men and women, slaves and free people, and between Jews and non-Jews.

Within the faith community, at least, identity won’t be determined by gender, social status, or race. Consider the radical nature of this idea. There would be no “out groups” and, therefore, no “in groups.” There is some evidence they actually did it, at least sometimes and in some places. Writers said of the early church that they loved one another in a radical way and that they turned the world upside down.

The Christian Church was not able to put this radical idea into practice for long. Within a few years, the growing split between Jews and Gentiles in the Church between permanent. The Christian Church became virtually all Gentile and increasingly anti-Semitic. Within two centuries, the Christian Church became absorbed by the apparatus of the Roman Empire. There were significant change as the Church began to define itself by who was in and who was out determined by adherence to the newly composed creeds.

There is still a tendency for the church to do the same today. Who’s in? Who’s not? Who believes correctly? But many congregations seek to be inclusive. Crossroads is such a congregation. Our boundaries are inclusive, defining who’s included rather than who’s excluded.

At Crossroads, we pride ourselves at being inclusive. But what exactly does that mean? Does inclusive mean anything goes or are there limits to who is included? Beyond that, how inclusive is the “Kingdom of God?” *All are welcome* is what the sign out in front of our building says. So, is anyone not welcome @ Crossroads? Is anyone not welcome in the life of God?

One of the primary slogans of Crossroads is, “Come as you are.” In other words, who you are is okay with us and we hope it will be ok with you. What is in your self-interest (love of self) is key to the journey. We also said, “Bring your questions and your wisdom and join us on the journey.”

There is perhaps an unspoken request not just to stay “as you are.” We recognize that each person needs to explore, to grow, to challenge, and to be challenged. But are you still included if you don’t necessarily want to grow, challenge, or be challenged? Of course you are! But if you don’t, you’ll be missing so much of what Crossroads has to offer. But you are included and I hope you’ll include the rest of us.

What’s the problem with a place that welcomes everyone? What’s the danger of trying to be open to everything? There is a tendency toward relativism—that anything’s okay. Such places act as if everything is of roughly equal value and that is just not true! So, we live and do church in a dynamic tension, at least here we do. Sometimes truth is found in a compromise between right and left and sometimes truth found on the right or on the left!

We are on a journey seeking truth that’s universal—ultimate. At the same time, we recognize that universal truth is just not available in any of our philosophies, theologies, or ideologies.

What undermines what we’re trying to do at Crossroads? Fear can undermine the process of seeking truth through inclusion. There is a fear of questions and a fear of questioning. Fear can also lead to not trusting God’s investment in us, to not trusting how important each of us is to the unfolding of the universe. Our efforts are undermined when our fear of being abandoned overwhelms our desire to reach out and serve—when our need to be understood supersedes our passion to understand and embrace. We are undermined when my pain blinds me to your presence. All of our lives are included in being church—the dark places, too. Being included is as much our choice as is being inclusive.

The New Testament says, “By grace are you saved.” It’s not through being good enough, not by believing correctly, and not by figuring out how to please God. We are open to the grace by learning to trust that you are in the life of God, that you are absolutely vital to God’s plans. There is nothing you can do to take away from God’s love for you. You’ll have a hard time feeling that love and making use of that love without practicing it in your relationships. The key is to trust how much God loves you, to trust how much God loves other people, and to trust and respect the journey others are taking.

What will we do with being the faith community of Crossroads Church, this way of being church that trusts so deeply in each person’s journey and trusts so deeply in the power of community? What we need to do with this gift of church is trust in it and believe in it. Be on the journey! Love your life and risk becoming yourself. Choose to believe in your own value. Then, work in this community. Trust the wisdom of the community. Commit to the life and work of the community. Trust that your journey is vital to the well-being of the community.

Today is Father’s Day. Not everyone has warm and fuzzy stories about their experiences with their fathers. That’s partly because the fathering role is not primarily a warm and fuzzy one.

Traditionally, the father role was to introduce us to the hard realities of life outside the home. It was to develop a capacity within us to stand on our own two feet and make our way in the world. I cannot tell you that every father is good at that—over that any of us are. Some do worse than others.

Father is an image for God that is less popular today than in the past. That's due partly to some fathers, and father figures, being unavailable, abusive, etc. What I celebrate in fatherhood, including father as one image for God, is the strength of heart that creates and holds space for others to find themselves, to grow and discover their own strength, and as a way to measure that growth.

I celebrate this strength in my own father and in those who fill that role for me today. I work to bring this strength to my own fathering as well as to the father-role of being a pastor. Without such strength, there is no space and little capacity for us to discover who we are and what we want in life. And until we begin to claim who we are and what we want, it will be very difficult for any of us to be inclusive.