



Wednesday Prayer

9th Sunday after Pentecost – Inclusion for all humanity

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 9:1-5

One of the key themes of Paul's letter to the Romans is the question of who is in and who is out. In this passage, his anguish is that not all Jews—his own community of origin—have accepted Christ as Messiah—something Paul deeply desires. He also has great concern that those who are “in” (both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christ) may take on an air of superiority over outsiders and anyone who is different from them.

Paul cautions against believers taking an attitude of privilege and judgement over non-believers. Despite Paul's human failings, he certainly wrestles deeply with questions about power dynamics and summons us to embrace grace and mercy toward others.

How do we understand Paul's dilemma in light of the imbalance of power and inequities that we are witnessing in so many ways today? We see more economic struggles between insiders and outsiders than ever due to the pandemic. The historical trauma and systemic oppression of people of color are finally being realized by many privileged communities.

The predators and exploiters have not pressed pause during the COVID-19 crisis. Reports of sex trafficking crimes and internet exploitation of juveniles have increased since the onset. The number of vulnerable youth has grown as previous safety networks have been stretched to respond.

Paul calls his readers to soften their hearts toward those who are excluded. He prays for full adoption and inclusion of “outsiders” into God's family. He relies on the Spirit to help us. And he reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

I encourage congregations to [make use of available resources](#) to reach out to youth and parents with information about staying safe during these uncertain times. Remind them that they belong to God and they have a community to support them.

Welcoming God, soften our hearts toward those who feel like outsiders. Inspire us to break down structures that perpetuate oppression, injustice and privilege. Open our hearts to a new Pentecost that unites the human family in love. Amen.

Written by Gay Gonnerman, a member of Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer, Minneapolis, MN, where she leads the Faith Formation ministry. She is also a development officer for a Twin Cities nonprofit and Advisory Board Chair for Cherish All Children.