

Galatians 4: 1-7 (Read by Bill)

4 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;² but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.³ So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

My friends, have you ever noticed how we are at our best when we are together. When we gather together, when we work together, when we care together. We were created to be in relationships ... relationships with one another ... and relationship with God.

This is what Paul is speaking about in this passage ... indeed in his entire letter to the Galatians. We are God’s children ... and as such we are brothers and sisters to one another. In this passage he is referring to some specific legal procedures through which a child formerly becomes an adult. Every society its own process of

witnessing that transformation from child to adult. In Paul's time the Greeks, the Romans and the Jews all had specific ceremonies in a child's... usually a male child's, life when they were included into the community of adults with all the rights and responsibilities of an adult. We too, even if our ceremonial recognition is a thing of the past, we still have embedded in our laws such notions of adulthood and full responsibility within the human community. Our laws express it in such ways as dictating when one is old enough to vote ... to serve in our armed forces ... to drive a car ... to sign a contract... to consent to medical procedures ... to marry.

Well Paul is using that moment ... that moment of transition of child to legally, community, recognized adult as a parallel to our spiritual growth. Through our faith in Christ Jesus we have made that transition from child ... to full member of the community of God. Children of God ... but not in the sense of minors without rights or responsibilities ... but full participating members of the Body of Christ.

And that is exactly what we are called upon to do ... to participate. As I said ... we are at our best when in community. When we are honouring our responsibilities as members of the family --- to care for one another, to support one another, to love one another. And when we do honour our responsibilities we also reap the rewards

Mapleton March 29 2009

... being cared for, being supported, being loved. For this is who we are ... who we were created to be ... an embracing, loving family of God.

This became very evident to me this past week. I had the privilege to be involved in three distinct gatherings which spoke to our need for community ... our need for right relationships.

Last night, I attended, with Larry and Irene, a mystery dinner in support of the Immanuel Christian School. It was a fun filled evening with a unique dinner ... you had to guess your courses and if you were unlucky you could end up with your dessert with your soup ... and only a toothpick to eat with. Needless to say there was a great deal of laughter. It was a prime example of a large group of Christians gathering together to support a good cause ... and to have fun. But even more so there was a generosity of spirit ... expressed through the goodwill ... and financial support the school received.

Well, earlier in the week I had been involved in another gathering. On Thursday it was my responsibility to sit at the door and collect money at the Lenten Meagre Meal in Aylmer. This is a soup and sandwich lunch prepared by a different church organization every Thursday throughout Lent to support the Corner Cupboard.

Mapleton March 29 2009

Again, as I sat at my post and watched all the people file by ... cheerfully handing over their \$5 ... and often more ... it was clear this is who we are meant to be.

Together caring and supporting one another. And the laughter and the chattering was evidence enough that good people had gathered to support the more vulnerable members of their own community ... with a generosity of spirit that was tangible... and contagious.

The third gathering I'd like to tell you about was a little different ... and on a smaller scale. This Friday I was invited to a friend's home to share a Shabbat Supper with another visiting friend from Montreal... a woman who is an Orthodox Jew. So with a generosity of spirit she patiently led us through her traditional welcoming of the Shabbat ... or Sabbath. And we had a lovely evening honouring the differences ... and the commonalities ... in our history, in our practices, in our scriptural interpretations. All the time united in laughter and good will.

You see, no matter whether it was a gathering of a faith group to strengthen its own beliefs ... a gathering of a community to support the vulnerable... or a gathering across faith traditions that opened up new understanding and new relationships ... we are meant to be in community ... we are created to be together.

Mapleton March 29 2009

Yet we often don't do it very well do we? Look at the brokenness of our world with its divisions between race, creed, and culture. Look at the brokenness of our communities with its divisions between the haves and have-nots, the weak and the strong, the secure and the vulnerable. Or even the divisions within our own families.

Today we have been given a beautiful gift. In Samantha's dedication we can look afresh at what it means to be community ... what it means to be family. We can see within her beauty and the love that surrounds her ... the beauty and the love within us all. Our desire to protect her, uplift her, nurture her, should remind us of our call to protect, uplift and nurture all of God's children. We, today are invited to make a commitment, as we have made a commitment to Samantha today, to strengthen all the ties of love that unite us ... unite us to our families, our friends and our communities. But also to as we transform and expand our church family to make room for little Samantha ... so we should also revision our understanding of family. And challenge ourselves... stretch ourselves to understand and to live family in its most expansive form ... to embrace all of God's Children. And then we may truly know that our Father – our Abba, has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and that we are God's Beloved.