

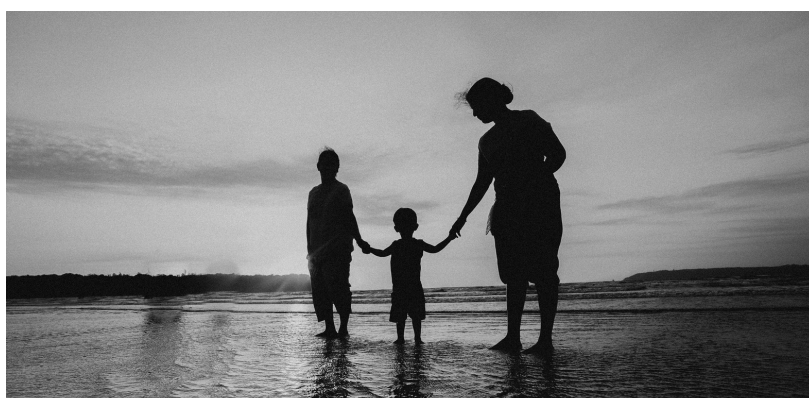
Devotional of the Month

Unity & Reconciliation



"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

~ Ezekiel 36:26



Our Holy Heritage and Community

Written by Brianna Oakley

I have always felt a need to "belong," a strong desire to be loved and accepted. I want people to think well of me. I have a yearning to feel important and be a part of something bigger than myself. There have been a few times in my life where I have been blessed enough to have a strong group of people around me – a group that support and encourage each other. When I have had this, it has been a great comfort.

When I look around and see the world we live in, it makes me believe that I am not the only one who feels this way. It seems as if everyone is searching for community. As people, we often congregate and strive to benefit one another. I see people groups forming based on ethnicities, nationalities, political views, and even general hobbies and interests, such as a common love for a sports team or music artist. Within a group, members are usually accepted and affirmed, but across different communities, there can be great division.

As we evaluate the world in which we live and see this pattern repeated amongst humans from all different contexts and backgrounds, the question arises, "Where does this need for community come from?" This curiosity takes us all the way back to the beginning. In Genesis 2, the Creator declares, "It is not good for man to be alone." As human beings and as image bearers of God, we were made for community. The Lord created us to be sons and daughters of God for the kingdom of God, yet we find ourselves so very often living for the things of this world.

Here on earth we are sometimes tempted to congregate around worldly hobbies and interests, and that is not bad in and of itself. But if we replace our fundamental identity (children of God and citizens of his kingdom) with something less significant, then not only will we become dissatisfied, disillusioned and depressed, but as a people we will also find ourselves hopelessly divided.

A beautiful example of someone who found herself separated from her cultural group because she decided to identify with the people of God is from a story in the book of Joshua about a woman named Rahab. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute and resident of Jericho. She was approached by Israelite spies who entered her home and sought protection.

When the king of Jericho heard of this interaction, he sent a message to Rahab and told her to bring the men out of her home and turn them in. Rahab did not comply. She had heard the stories of the Israelites' mighty God and believed them, so she disregarded her ethnic, political and national allegiances in favor of a greater allegiance to God, choosing to save the Israelites by hiding them in her home and helping them escape. She understood that the material things that made her a part of earthly communities ultimately paled in comparison to who she was in the eyes of the one true God. Because of her actions, God spared Rahab and her family from the destruction of the city of Jericho and blessed her even further by placing her in the line of the coming Messiah, a great-grandmother several generations removed of Jesus himself!

Our heritage, nationalities and political views are a part of who we are, but they are secondary to our identity in Christ. Our true and primary heritage is our kinship to the King. Although we may disagree and be divided on issues that seem to be ever present on earth, we are bonded together by our heavenly sisterhood. And when we are faced with issues that make us distrust our leaders and quarrel over the direction of our countries are heading in, let us remember that we are first citizens of heaven, serving a sovereign ruler who works all things together for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28).

It is by the grace of God that we have a holy community to which we belong, so as the apostle Paul urges, let us "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."



*"Be completely humble and gentle,
be patient bearing with one another
in love. Make every effort to keep
the unity of the Spirit through the
bond of peace."*

EPHESIANS 4:2-3