



VOL. 2 ISSUE 5

# THE OASIS

Seasonal Journal of Southminster Presbyterian Church

## Oneness in Christ

BY REV. MATT GEARKE

"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." The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the church in Galatia. At the heart of Paul's words is the question of identity and who defines our identity. Paul's words make it clear that society defines us one way and Jesus defines us another way. Society defines us by our race, gender and social status. Jesus defines us by our unity or oneness in Him. So, Paul is challenging us to contemplate who we are individually and corporately. Certainly not an easy task!

To help you, I encourage you to try this locating exercise: Imagine three concentric circles, as you move inward, each circle will help you to better orient and locate where you are. In the first circle consider the facts and circumstances of your life that you cannot change. In the second circle consider the areas of your life where you make personal choices and exercise some control. In the third and inner most circle consider the center of your being where you are who you truly are.

This exercise constructed by Margaret Silf and based on Ignatian Spirituality, asks three basic questions as you move inward: Where Am I? How am I? Who am I? Each circle revealing more and more how our true self, how our core identity, is defined by oneness with God. I encourage you to try this exercise yourself. Take your time, don't rush, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you from circle to circle in God's time.

Oneness, to paraphrase Henri Nouwen, happens when the Spirit of Jesus allows us to see the heart of God, the heart of the universe, and our own hearts as one. In other words, by coming to know Jesus, we also come to know ourselves and all of creation as being shaped by God, and defined by God's will. So, this summer, as we attempt to relocate and reclaim our lives in an almost post-COVID world, turn to Jesus and the oneness he promises. For in oneness with Christ, we come to know peace, contentment, and wholeness. Have a relaxing and wonderful summer!

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## Unity of the Spirit

'In this meditation, African American mystic and scholar Howard Thurman (1899–1981) reminds us of how our love for God is one with our love for our neighbor.

Long ago, Plotinus [205–270 CE] wrote, "If we are in unity with the Spirit, we are in unity with each other, and so we are all one." [1] The words of this ancient Greek mystic are suggestive; for they call attention to the underlying unity of all of life. The recognition of the Spirit of God as the unifying principle of all life becomes at once the most crucial experience of humanity. It says that whoever is aware of the Spirit of God in themselves enters the doors that lead into the life of their fellow people. The same idea is stated in ethical terms in the New Testament when the suggestion is made that, if a person says they love God, whom they hath not seen, and does not love their brother or sister who is with them, they are a liar and the truth does not dwell in them [1 John 4:20]. The way is difficult, because it is very comforting to withdraw from the responsibility of unity with one's fellow people and to enter alone into the solitary contemplation of God. One can have . . . [perfect] solitary communion without the risks of being misunderstood, of having one's words twisted, of having to be on the defensive about one's true or alleged attitude. In the quiet fellowship with one's God, one may seem to be relieved of any necessity to make headway against heavy odds. This is why one encounters persons of deep piousness and religiosity who are intolerant and actively hostile toward their fellow people. Some of the most terrifying hate organizations in the country are made up in large part of persons who are very devout in their worship of their God.

The test to which Plotinus puts us, however, is very searching. To be in unity with the Spirit is to be in unity with one's fellow people. Not to be in unity with one's fellow people is thereby not to be in unity with the Spirit. The pragmatic test of one's unity with the Spirit is found in the unity with one's fellow people. We see what this means when we are involved in the experience of a broken relationship. When I have lost harmony with another, my whole life is thrown out of tune. God tends to be remote and far away when a desert and sea appear between me and another. I draw close to God as I draw close to my fellow people. The great incentive remains ever alert; I cannot be at peace without God, and I cannot be truly aware of God if I am not at peace with my fellow people.

[1] Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.5.7. Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Beacon Press: 1981), 120–121.



## A Prayer for Oneness

I rest in you, Spirit of Life. I place in you my feet, my legs, my torso, my arms, my shoulders, my head and allow you to support all that I am. I rest in you, Spirit of Life, and give to you my worries, my fears, my doubts, my hopes, my joys, my pains, my anger, my love, my hate, and allow you to take in all that I am. And as I give all that I am, I find the place of truth, stillness, still, eternal where you and I are one. Amen.

- Karen Barrett

"Community cannot for long feed on itself; it can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond, their unknown and undiscovered brothers."

HOWARD THURMAN







## Our Faith is in Community

We're in a spiritual crisis, and the key to building a true belonging practice is maintaining our belief in inextricable human connection. That connection—the spirit that flows between us and every other human in the world—is not something that can be broken; however, our belief in the connection is constantly tested and repeatedly severed. —Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*

On my own, I don't know how to believe that I am a child or heir of God. It is being together in our wholeness, with the entire body of Christ, that makes it somehow easier to believe that we are beautiful. We each have our own little part of the beauty, our own gifts of the Spirit, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul says that the particular way "the Spirit is given to each person is for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Paul's word for this is a "charism"—a gift that is given to each person not just for themselves, but to build up the community and even society. Since we don't have the full responsibility of putting it all together as individuals, we can shed the false theology of perfectionism. All we have to do is discover our own gift, even if it is just one thing, and use it for the good of all.

Paul uses the brilliant metaphor of the body to show how unity is created out of diversity: "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. . . . Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it" (see 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27).

So we, in our corporate wholeness, are the glory of God, the goodness of God, the presence of God. As an individual, I participate in that wholeness, and that is holiness! It's not my private holiness; it's our connectedness together. In Peter's words, echoing the Hebrew Scriptures, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart, who have been called out of darkness into this wonderful light. Once you were not a people at all; now you are the very people of God" (1 Peter 2:9–10). Jesus' corporate image is the Reign or Kingdom of God. Paul's is the Body of Christ. John's is the journey into mystical union where "I and the Father are one" (see John 10:30).

All of them are looking for a corporate, communal, participatory image of what's really happening, because the individual cannot carry such glory and greatness—and neither can the individual bear such universal suffering and sadness.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Great Themes of Paul: Life as Participation*, disc 7 (Franciscan Media: 2002), CD.

## Reading Suggestions

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS:

"What is God Like" by Rachel Held Evans, Matthew Paul Turner, Illustrated by Yinig Hui Tan

"Breath: A Child's Guide to Ascension, Pentecost, and the Growing Time" by Laura Alary, Illustrated by Cathrin Peterslund.

"Good Good Father" by Chris Tomlin, Pat Barrett, Illustrated by Lorna Hussey

"When I Pray for You" by Matthew Paul Turner, Illustrated by Kimberly Barnes

"A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles" by Thich Nhat Hanh

### ADULT BOOKS:

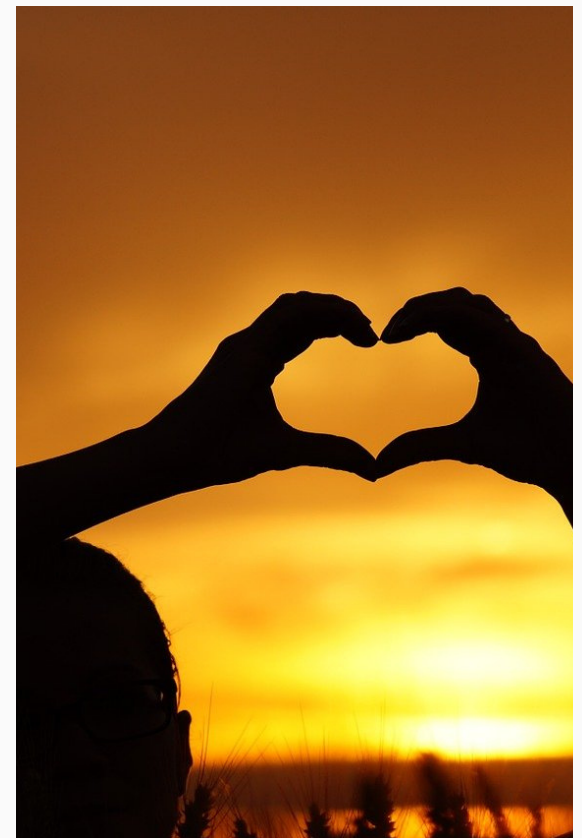
"Meditations of the Heart" by Howard Thurman

"Christ of the Celts - The Healing of Creation" by J. Philip Newell

"Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World" by Henri J.M. Nouwen

"The Universal Christ" by Richard Rohr

"Braving the Wilderness" by Brene Brown





## Unity

BY REV. LIZ NICKERSON

The theme of the Book of Ephesians is unity in Christ. Unity is always a challenge for us humans because we want to go our own way and do our own thing. Especially as Americans we pride ourselves on our freedoms and unity can be hard to achieve. As Christians, Jesus reminds us that we are part of a larger story and each have a role to play in the unity of Christ. Being united in Christ means that we focus on fulfilling Christ's mission in this world to love God and love our neighbor. I like the image in this passage where Paul explains that each believer is a brick in the temple of God! Since people are the bricks, we can see that God is on the move and is not static. In a year where we had to close the church, to in person activities, the church was still active because we are each a human brick; the church is not just composed of the physical brick walls at 916 East Central Road. God's Spirit of love can work through us wherever we are. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." Ephesians 3:17-18



We are being built together so God can dwell in us and use us to fulfill his mission. God's Spirit shines through the work we do collectively as the church and individually as members of it. Recently members of our mission team went to Good News Partners in Chicago and helped renovate the Jonquil Hotel, low-income apartments, by painting rooms and replacing ceiling tile. The staff was in awe, as our members and friends created an inviting space for people in need of a safe and affordable home. Collectively SPC had donated over 6,000 items to the Wheeling Township Food Pantry! Our Covid - 19 relief fund has helped four families in need this past year! Our unity in the spirit is shown when we each come together to serve those in need in our community and show Christ's love. So how is God calling you at this time to serve others? Remember God's spirit dwells in you and will work through you to fulfill God's mission!

## Ephesians 2:21-22

**“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a Holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”**

