

The line is long. The wait is unbearable. It has been a long day, yet there is a lot left. And I'm hungry.

I finally get to the front of the line, grab my tray, and make my way to the plethora of options – hot lunch, salad bar, French fries, pizza, chocolate milk. So many decisions. But the real choice comes after I get my food.

Where do you sit.

What table is open?

Where are my friends?

Where do I belong.

Peter, as he was visiting Churches, eating and worshiping and celebrating with Gentile Christians...but when certain Jews were around, Peter would back away from the table, or refuse to let them sit down. And people were confused, angry. Paul tried to set the record straight, opposing Peter.

God's ways is a way that includes everyone in the fellowship at the table. Still, as churches were being created, people was asking the question – who's in, who's out...what do we have to do follow Jesus. Everyone wants to fit in.

How do we become God's child?

How do we get God's love and forgiveness?

How do we get a seat at God's table?

What do we do to receive God's promise and grace?

Nothing!

We should know that by now! Not only have we had 2000 years to figure that out, but we have read this in the narrative the past 3 weeks – the Ethiopian eunuch being baptized, the argument over circumcision (becoming a Jew before Christian), this debate over the law justifying us.

God works through the barriers that we put in the way. God works beyond the rules and regulations we concoct. God can't be stopped by us.

But that doesn't stop us from turning God's yes, into our no.

When you are school and you look for that table to sit at...you can't just sit down anywhere. There are rules. Certain tables are for the football players, another table for the drama kids, another for the loners, the cool girls get a table, so do the math geeks. And really shouldn't cross those lines. There may be exceptions – but mostly you know your place. Where you could sit, and where you could not.

But God doesn't work by the rules of the school cafeteria tables.

The Old Testament understanding is that keeping the law is how you belong to the family of faith. You get circumcised. You obey the commandments. You eat the right food. You say the right prayers. You keep clean. You follow what is sacred, and stay away from what is profane.

But not for Paul. Paul was insistent that it is by God's grace – a free gift – that we are given anything. Nothing we do – good or bad – changes the way God acts. God is not dependent on us.

Belonging isn't about doing the right thing, or anything. We are here because of faith. Whose faith? Not our own...it aint about us or our belief. It is Christ's faith. Christ's faithfulness – to the cross. To death and to life again.

Christ living in and through us, bearing the witness that we belong. We belong because of God's faith in us. We think we have to do something, say something, choose Jesus as our Lord and Savior – but isn't that just Old Testament law theology and understanding resurrected? Why would we try and revert back to an old way of understanding, when God, through Christ, gave us the greatest gifts and promises imaginable?

Because Christ lives, we live. Christ fulfilled the law, to give us life. To release us from the old rules and

barriers. If we were justified through following the law of the commandments, Christ died for nothing. Christ's life and death and resurrection is a gift to us. Belief in God isn't controlled by us....it is the work of the spirit.

Paul is gets pretty fired up about this issue!

Today we celebrate baptism – not as a ticket to heaven – but recognizing the promises that God gives to Hunter and us – long before baptism.

Today we celebrate communion – not to get some recognition from God, a tally mark in the ledger book of life - but as a reminder of the grace and love and forgiveness that the Spirit pours into everyone at every meal.

Today we celebrate Bible presentation – not because we have a special hold on God's Word, or that this book contains the answers – but that we are part of this amazing story of faith, with all the joy and challenges that each of face together as people of God.

The Word, the Water, the Meal – those are God's gifts to us – not because we are deserving...or made the right choices...or we are perfect Christians...but as a

gift. So that we may explore faith and doubt, recognize God's presence, care for others and proclaim God's justice and peace.

The gifts are not recognition awards for a job well done, but tools to be used so that others may see, feel, hear, taste, and smell God's goodness. So that others may feel a sense of belonging.

We have a place at God's table, we are God's forgiven child, we are in this story of life – because God says so. Because God chooses us.

We belong.