



A devotional journey into community

A devotional prepared by Rev. Randy Terry

THE COMMUNITY OF
ST. DYSMAS
I was in Prison & You Came To Visit Me



st. john's lutheran church
of sweet air

Themes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *Life Together*

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Introduction: A Devotional Journey into Community

Life in Christian community is one of the most profound gifts of grace that God bestows upon His people.

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer illuminates the beauty and challenges of living as the body of Christ, offering timeless wisdom on what it means to walk in fellowship with one another. Community, he reminds us, is not a creation of human effort but a gift given by the grace of God, held together by the centrality of Christ Himself.

As believers, we are called to live humbly, serving one another in love, and to engage in the ministries of listening, bearing burdens, and extending confession and forgiveness.

Through prayer, worship, and gratitude, we cultivate a spirit of unity that reflects the heart of God. Yet, Bonhoeffer also warns us of the dangers of idealizing community, challenging us to embrace the imperfections of others and ourselves with grace and humility.

This devotional invites you to explore the rich and multifaceted life of Christian community.

This devotional also is a candidacy internship project shared between St. John's Lutheran Church

Sweet Air, MD and St. Dysmas Community, a congregation of incarcerated siblings in the Delaware-Maryland Synod.

Our Lenten theme, "Doing *Life Together*" invites us to meditate and reflect together.

This devotion will be shared among our various ministry teams and for individual use. Your feedback is welcome. Send your stories to office@stjohnssweetair.org.

~Rev. Randy Terry
February 2025

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion I

Devotion: Christian Community as a Gift of Grace

Opening Reflection

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, writes:

"Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. "

This truth reminds us that Christian community is not something we create through effort or perfect harmony. It is a gift of grace given by God through Jesus Christ. It is not based on our similarities, abilities, or preferences but on our shared faith in Christ. In this gift of community, we are bound together as the body of Christ, called to love and serve one another in humility, even as we acknowledge our imperfections.

As we reflect on this theme, let us give thanks for the fellowship we share, recognizing that it is a precious gift, and let us seek to extend this gift of community to others, especially those who feel excluded, forgotten, or alone.

Scripture Reading

- Ephesians 4: 1—6

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith ' one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. "

- Psalm 133:1

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

Meditation

Bonhoeffer reminds us that community is not something we create by our own power. It is given to us in Christ. This truth humbles us and fills us with gratitude because it means that we are all here together, not by chance or merit, but because of God's grace.

This gift of community extends beyond church walls. It reaches those who may feel cut off from others—like the men and women in prison who are part of The Community of Saint Dysmas. Even within prison walls, Christian community is alive because the same Spirit unites us in Christ. Through the ministry of Saint Dysmas, we see how God's grace bridges the gap between the local church and those who are incarcerated.

Bonhoeffer challenges us to see community as something sacred, not perfect. He says:

"The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and His work become the one and only thing that is vital between us."

What would it look like for us to see all Christian fellowship as a reflection of Christ's grace? What would it mean for us to intentionally extend that grace to those who long for connection and belonging?

Take a moment to reflect on the gift of Christian community in your life:

- Who has supported and encouraged you in your faith journey?
- Who might need to be reminded that they are part of this gift of community?
- How might God be calling you to help extend this grace to others?

Let us give thanks for this sacred gift and ask God to use us to build bridges of grace and love to others.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of Christian community, a reflection of your grace and a sign of your kingdom. Today, we lift our hearts to you in prayer, asking for your Spirit to deepen our love for one another and to extend your gift of community to those who long for it.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for the Church, your body in the world. Unite us in humility, gentleness, and love, so that our fellowship may reflect your grace to the world.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for The Community of Saint Dysmas and all who minister to those in prison. Strengthen chaplains, volunteers, and worshippers as they proclaim your hope and love. May the light of Christ shine brightly in places of darkness.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are incarcerated, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Remind them that they are never forgotten by you or your Church. Surround them with your love, and give them hope and peace.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel isolated, whether by physical distance, illness, grief, or fear. Draw them into the fellowship of your people, and help us to be your hands and feet, reaching out in love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Finally, Lord, we lift before you the needs of our own hearts and those we name before you now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.) Let us respond.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord Jesus, you have called us into the unity of your Spirit. Help us to treasure this gift and to share it with all people, that your love may be known in every place. We pray this in your holy name. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

As we go forth today, let us remember Bonhoeffer's words:

"It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. "

Treasure the community God has given you. Seek to build it up in love and extend its reach to those who long to be part of the fellowship of grace.

Blessing:

May the God who calls us into fellowship, the Christ who unites us in grace, and the Spirit who binds us together in love bless and keep you this day and always. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 2

Devotion: The Centrality of Christ in Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

"Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this."

These words remind us that Christ is the foundation and center of all Christian relationships. Without Christ, our fellowship becomes a human creation, shaped by personal preferences and desires. With Christ at the center, however, our community becomes a sacred expression of God's grace.

When Christ is central, we see one another through his eyes. Our fellowship is not defined by what we have in common or how well we get along but by our shared faith in Jesus. This truth challenges us to look beyond ourselves and embrace all people as part of Christ's body—including those who are often overlooked, such as the incarcerated.

This morning, we reflect on how the centrality of Christ transforms Christian community, making it a place where love, forgiveness, and grace flow freely.

Scripture Reading

- Colossians 1: 17—18

"He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."

- John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing."

Meditation

Bonhoeffer insists that Christ must be at the center of our community because he is the one who brings us together and sustains us. He writes: "We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."

This means that Christian community is not based on shared interests, social status, or personal compatibility. It is rooted in our shared relationship with Christ, who calls us into unity. Without Christ, community falls apart because it depends solely on human effort. When Christ is central, however, we can overcome divisions, forgive one another, and live in true fellowship.

This truth has powerful implications for how we see and include others in our community. The ministry of The Community of Saint Dismas, which serves incarcerated individuals, is a living example of Christ-centered fellowship. Within prison walls, men and women gather in worship, prayer, and mutual care. Christ is present among them, uniting them in his love and grace, just as he unites us with them.

Bonhoeffer challenges us to recognize that our unity with others flows through Christ:

- We relate to one another not directly, but through him.
- We love others because Christ first loved us.
- We forgive others because we have been forgiven in Christ.

Reflect on these questions:

- Is Christ truly at the center of your relationships and your community?
- How does seeing others through Christ change your perspective, especially on those who are marginalized or incarcerated?
- How might you extend Christ's love to others today, knowing that he binds us together as one body?

Let us recommit ourselves to making Christ the center of our lives and our community, so that our fellowship reflects his love and grace to the world.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the foundation and center of all Christian community. You have called us into fellowship with you and with one another through your grace. We come before you in prayer, asking you to deepen our unity in you and help us reflect your love to the world.

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

We pray for your Church, the body of Christ in the world. Strengthen our witness and make us a light of hope and reconciliation in a divided world.

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

We pray for ministries like The Community of Saint Dismas, which extend your grace to those in prison. Bless the chaplains, volunteers, and worshippers who seek to live out your love behind bars. May their fellowship bear witness to your transforming power.

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

We pray for the incarcerated, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Remind them that they are not forgotten, but deeply loved by you. Give them hope and strength as they seek to grow in faith and community.

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel excluded from community—whether due to isolation, pain, or fear. Open our hearts to welcome them, and show us how to be instruments of your grace.

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

We lift before you the needs of our own hearts and the prayers of those we name now. . . (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, unite us in your love.

Leader:

Lord Jesus, you are the vine, and we are the branches. Help us to abide in you so that our lives and our communities bear fruit for your kingdom. In your holy name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"Without Christ, there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother."

As you go forth today, seek to live in Christ-centered community. Let his love, forgiveness, and grace flow through you to those around you, and remember that his presence unites us all—no matter who we are or where we are.

Blessing

May Christ, the head of the Church and the center of all community, bless you and keep you in his grace. May you go forth in his peace to love and serve one another, as he has first loved you. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 3

Devotion: Living in Community Requires Humility and Service

Opening Reflection

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, writes:

"The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren. The Church will place its confidence only in the simple servant of the Word of God because it knows that it will be guided not by the human wisdom and human capacities, but by the Word of the Good Shepherd "

These words remind us that living in Christian community requires humility and service, modeled after the example of Christ himself. Community is not about asserting our own desires or seeking recognition but about putting others before ourselves, serving one another with love, and reflecting the self-giving nature of Christ.

Humility and service are not easy in a world that values power, self-promotion, and independence. But in Christian community, they are essential. When we humble ourselves, we make space for others. When we serve, we strengthen the bonds of love that unite us in Christ.

Today, let us reflect on how humility and service are foundational to the life we share as the body of Christ, and how God calls us to embody these virtues both in our local church and in ministries like The Community of Saint Dysmas.

Scripture Readings

- Philippians 2:3-8

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. "

- John 13:14-15

"If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. "

Meditation

Bonhoeffer emphasizes that humility is a cornerstone of life together. He writes:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. This is the path of humility and service that Christ has set before us.

In Christian community, we are called to see others not as competitors or obstacles, but as brothers and sisters in Christ. Humility allows us to listen without judgment, forgive without hesitation, and serve without expecting anything in return. It teaches us to follow Christ's example, who emptied himself and took on the role of a servant to show us the depth of God's love.

Service, too, is central to life in community. It is through serving one another that we reflect the love of Christ. Bonhoeffer warns us, however, that this service must come from a place of genuine love and humility—not from a desire to appear righteous or to control others. True service happens when we surrender our ego and trust that God's strength will work through our small, daily acts of love.

Consider how this applies not only to our relationships within the local church but also to ministries like The Community of Saint Dysmas. Serving those who are incarcerated requires humility—a willingness to step outside our comfort zones and see Christ in people whom society often forgets. When we do so, we live out the radical, countercultural love that Jesus calls us to embody.

Reflect on these questions:

How might God be calling you to serve with humility in your community?

Are there ways you can put others' needs ahead of your own to reflect Christ's love?

How can humility and service help us bridge the gap between the local church and those who are marginalized, such as the incarcerated?

Let us commit ourselves to living lives of humility and service, trusting that God will use our efforts to build stronger, Christ-centered communities.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

God of grace and humility, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Help us to follow his example as we live together in community, humbly serving one another in love.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

We pray for the Church, that it may be a community of humility and service, reflecting the love of Christ to the world. May we lay aside selfish ambition and seek to serve one another with joy.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

We pray for The Community of Saint Dysmas and all prison ministries that seek to extend Christ's love to the incarcerated. Strengthen the chaplains, volunteers, and worshippers who minister to those behind bars. May they serve with humility and compassion, showing the world that all people are loved by you.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

We pray for those who are incarcerated, especially those who feel forgotten or unloved. May they encounter your grace through the service of others, and may they come to know their worth as beloved children of God.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

We pray for those in our own lives who are in need of service and care. Help us to serve them with humility, not seeking recognition but reflecting your love. Open our eyes to opportunities to serve in small, meaningful ways.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

We pray for ourselves, that we may grow in humility and follow the example of Christ, who washed his disciples' feet. Teach us to put others' needs before our own and to trust that you will work through our service to bring healing and unity.

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

Lord, we lift before you the prayers of our hearts and the needs of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, teach us humility and service.

Leader:

God of love, make us humble servants of your kingdom. Let our lives reflect the humility and grace of Jesus, who came to serve and save. In his holy name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"Only he who lives by the forgiveness of his sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself. He will know that his own wisdom reached the end of its tether when Jesus forgave him.

Go forth today with the heart of a servant. Humble yourself, not for recognition, but to reflect Christ's love. Seek ways to serve in your church, your community, and in ministries like The Community of Saint Dismas. May your humility and service bring glory to God and strengthen the bonds of Christian fellowship.

Blessing

May the humility of Christ guide you, the love of Christ fill you, and the Spirit of Christ empower you to serve others with joy. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 4

Devotion: The Importance of Prayer in Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“It is in fact the most normal thing in the common Christian life to pray together. A Christian community either lives by the intercessory prayers of its members for one another, or the community will be destroyed.”

Prayer is the lifeblood of Christian community. It connects us to God, centers our relationships on Christ, and builds unity among believers. Bonhoeffer reminds us that prayer is not just an individual practice but a communal one, where we bring one another before God with love, faith, and humility. Through prayer, we are reminded that our unity does not depend on human effort but on God’s grace.

When we pray together, we bear one another’s burdens, celebrate each other’s joys, and grow in love. Prayer deepens our fellowship, allowing us to see one another as God sees us. It also extends beyond the boundaries of our immediate community, connecting us with believers everywhere, including those in places like The Community of Saint Dysmas, where prayer sustains and strengthens faith in the midst of hardship.

Today, let us reflect on how prayer nurtures community and unites us as the body of Christ.

Scripture Reading

- Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

- I Timothy 2:1

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer emphasizes that prayer is essential for the health of Christian community. He writes:

“A day without morning and evening prayers and personal intercessions is unthinkable for the Christian individual, and therefore even more so for the Christian community.”

Prayer is where the work of community begins. It is in prayer that we learn to care for one another, to forgive, and to live in harmony. In prayer, we are reminded that our strength comes not from ourselves but from God, who sustains and blesses our fellowship.

Bonhoeffer also teaches that intercessory prayer—praying for others—is particularly vital in community. When we pray for one another, our hearts are transformed. It becomes impossible to hold grudges, envy, or judgment against someone for whom we earnestly pray. Instead, prayer fosters empathy, compassion, and a deeper bond in Christ.

Prayer in community also connects us with the global Church. Ministries like The Community of Saint Dysmas, which serves incarcerated individuals, are sustained by the prayers of believers. When we lift up those in prison, we affirm their place in the body of Christ and share in their burdens and joys. Prayer bridges divides, reminding us that we are all one in Christ, no matter our circumstances.

Reflect on these questions:

- How can you cultivate a deeper practice of prayer for others in your community?
- Who might God be calling you to pray for, especially those who are forgotten or marginalized?
- How does praying together strengthen the bonds of fellowship in your church or community?

May we recommit ourselves to the practice of prayer, trusting that God will use it to draw us closer to one another and to him.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious God, you have called us into fellowship with one another and with you. Teach us to pray for one another with love and faith, trusting in your power to unite and sustain us.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for the Church, that it may be a praying community, rooted in your Word and united in love. Help us to devote ourselves to prayer, lifting one another up in faith and compassion.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for ministries like The Community of Saint Dymas, which serve those who are incarcerated. Bless the chaplains, volunteers, and worshippers who gather in your name behind prison walls. May their prayers and worship be a testimony to your grace and power.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are in prison. May they know your love and presence through the prayers of your people. Strengthen their faith, bring them hope, and remind them that they are part of your body.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our local communities and churches. Help us to be faithful in prayer for one another so that our fellowship may reflect your love. Teach us to pray for those we struggle to love so that your Spirit may work in us to bring reconciliation and peace.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel isolated, forgotten, or overwhelmed by life's challenges. May they find comfort in the prayers of others and strength in knowing that they are not alone.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up our own prayers and the needs of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

God of community, we thank you for the gift of prayer. Unite us as your people and strengthen us to be faithful in praying for one another. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"Intercession is not just an act of piety; it is a vital part of living together as the body of Christ."

Go forth today committed to prayer. Pray for those in your community, for the Church, and for those who are often forgotten. Trust that God works through prayer to strengthen fellowship and bring hope, healing, and unity.

Blessing

May the peace of Christ guide your prayers, the love of Christ strengthen your community, and the Spirit of Christ empower you to pray with boldness and joy. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 5

Devotion: The Ministry of Listening

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. ' "

Listening is an act of love, humility, and service. In a world filled with noise and distractions, the ability to truly listen has become rare. Yet Bonhoeffer reminds us that listening is not optional in Christian community—it is a ministry we owe to one another.

When we listen, we affirm the worth and dignity of the other person. We reflect the love of Christ, who listens to our prayers and cares for our concerns. Listening draws us closer together, deepens our relationships, and allows us to bear one another's burdens. It is a sacred act, through which we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

Today, let us reflect on how we can embrace the ministry of listening in our lives and communities, making space for others to feel heard, valued, and loved.

Scripture Reading

- James 1:19

"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

- Galatians 6:2

"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. ' "

Meditation

Bonhoeffer calls listening the foundation of love in Christian community. He writes:

"We do not listen with only half an ear, presuming already to know what the other person has to say. That is too impatient, too self-assured. We listen with the ears of God, that we may speak the Word of God. "

True listening requires humility. It means setting aside our own agendas and being fully present with the other person. It is not about offering solutions, advice, or judgments—it is about creating space for someone to share their heart, trusting that God is present in the conversation.

Listening is particularly important in times of pain or struggle. When we listen, we bear one another's burdens, as Paul writes in Galatians. We may not have the answers, but through our attentive presence, we reflect the compassion and care of Christ.

The ministry of listening also strengthens Christian community. It fosters trust, encourages openness, and helps us to see one another as Christ sees us. It reminds us that every person's story matters, and every voice deserves to be heard.

Reflect on these questions:

- How often do you listen with patience and without interruption?
- Are there people in your life or community who need you to listen more deeply to them?
- How might the ministry of listening strengthen your relationships and your church?

As we embrace the ministry of listening, we embody the love of Christ, who hears our prayers and cares for our concerns. May we strive to listen with the ears of God, bringing healing and unity to our communities.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Loving God, you have given us the gift of listening ears and caring hearts. Teach us to embrace the ministry of listening, so that we may reflect your love to one another.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for your Church, that it may be a community of love and understanding. Help us to listen to one another with humility and grace, bearing one another's burdens as you have called us to do.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel unheard or overlooked. Open our ears to their cries, and help us to create spaces where all may feel valued, loved, and understood.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those in leadership within the Church and in ministries like The Community of Saint Dysmas. Grant them the wisdom to listen deeply to the needs and stories of those they serve, so they may lead with compassion and integrity.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are burdened by pain, grief, or fear. Help us to listen to their struggles and to walk alongside them with empathy and love, trusting that you are at work in their lives.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our own communities and families, that we may listen to one another with open hearts, setting aside our own needs and agendas to truly hear and love one another as you have loved us.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up our own prayers, and the concerns of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of community and the opportunity to serve one another through listening. Transform us through this ministry so that your love may be known through our words, actions, and presence. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

'Listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. However, they do not find it among Christians because these Christians are talking where they should be listening.'

Go forth today as a listener. Listen to the voices of those around you with humility and love. Trust that through the ministry of listening, God will deepen your relationships, strengthen your community, and reveal his presence.

Blessing

May the love of Christ guide your heart, the Spirit of Christ open your ears, and the peace of Christ fill your community as you serve one another through listening. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 6

Devotion: The Ministry of Bearing Burdens

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Christian must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated.”

Bearing one another’s burdens is a vital part of Christian community. It is not always easy or comfortable, but it is an essential expression of Christ’s love. When we bear one another’s burdens, we reflect the grace and compassion of Jesus, who carried the ultimate burden for us on the cross.

This ministry requires patience, humility, and selflessness. It invites us to step outside our own needs and walk alongside others in their struggles, pain, or weakness. Bonhoeffer reminds us that in bearing burdens, we follow the example of Christ, who calls us to serve one another in love.

Today, let us reflect on how we can share in this ministry, shouldering one another’s burdens as we live out the call to be the body of Christ.

Scripture Reading

- Galatians 6:2

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

- Matthew 11:28–30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer reminds us that living in community means embracing the imperfections, struggles, and weaknesses of others. He writes:

“It is, first of all, the freedom of the other person, and the burden of what he is, that constitutes the ministry of bearing.”

In bearing another’s burden, we affirm their worth and dignity as a child of God. This ministry is not about fixing their problems or taking their struggles away. Instead, it is about being present, offering support, and walking alongside them in love.

The ministry of bearing burdens also requires us to surrender our own pride. We must recognize that we are all in need of grace and that, at times, we too are the ones who need others to bear our burdens. In this mutual care, we embody the law of Christ—the law of love.

Bonhoeffer’s words also challenge us to embrace those who may be difficult to love. When we bear the burdens of someone who frustrates or challenges us, we practice the radical love of Jesus. It is through these acts of selflessness that we grow in humility and reflect the heart of Christ to the world.

Reflect on these questions:

- Who in your life or community is carrying a heavy burden? How can you offer them support?
- How can you humbly allow others to bear your burdens?
- How does bearing burdens draw you closer to Christ and to others?

May we commit ourselves to this ministry, trusting that through it, God will strengthen our community and deepen our love for one another.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Lord Jesus, you have called us to bear one another's burdens as an act of love and service. Teach us to follow your example and to care for one another with humility and compassion.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for your Church, that it may be a community where burdens are shared and no one feels alone. Strengthen us to support one another and to embody your love in all that we do.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are carrying heavy burdens—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Surround them with your peace and send people into their lives who can offer support and encouragement.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for ministries like The Community of Saint Dismas, which bring hope and community to those in prison. May they continue to bear the burdens of those they serve, showing the power of your grace and love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel isolated or overwhelmed by their struggles. Help us to notice their needs and to offer them kindness and care.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our own hearts, that we may learn to bear the burdens of others with humility, and that we may be willing to receive help when we are in need.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts and the needs of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of community and the opportunity to bear one another's burdens. May your Spirit guide us as we live out this ministry of love. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"The Christian is called to bear the burden of his brother in the freedom and strength of God's Spirit. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining."

Go forth today with a renewed commitment to bear one another's burdens, trusting that God will give you the strength to love and serve as Christ has loved and served you.

Blessing

May the grace of Christ sustain you, the love of God guide you, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit strengthen you as you bear the burdens of others in humility and love. Go in peace to serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 7

Devotion: The Power of Confession and Forgiveness

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“In confession, the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him. Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins, the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother. Because this humiliation is so hard, we continually scheme to evade confession to a brother.”

Bonhoeffer reminds us that confession is not a weakness—it is a pathway to freedom, healing, and restored community. Through confession, we come face-to-face with our sin, reject the isolation it creates, and embrace the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness, in turn, is the gift of grace we extend to one another, binding us together in love and humility.

The ministry of confession and forgiveness is vital for life together as Christians. It is not merely about clearing guilt but about breaking down the barriers sin creates between us and God, and between one another. Through confession, the truth comes into the light, and through forgiveness, the grace of Christ brings reconciliation and peace.

Scripture Reading

- James 5:16

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

- Colossians 3:13

“Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer teaches us that confession is an act of courage and humility. In confessing our sins, we reject the isolation sin causes and acknowledge our deep need for both God’s grace and the support of our Christian community. He writes:

“A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.”

Confession is not easy. It requires us to confront our pride, acknowledge our failures, and become vulnerable before others. Yet, in this act, we experience the liberating power of God’s grace. When we confess, we proclaim that Christ’s love is greater than our sin.

Forgiveness is the next step in this sacred process. Just as we receive God’s forgiveness, we are called to forgive one another. Forgiveness is not optional—it is the mark of a community living in the love of Christ. Forgiving others requires us to let go of anger, resentment, and the desire for revenge. It is a choice to extend the same grace we have received from God.

In confession and forgiveness, we experience the profound healing of God's Spirit. Relationships are restored, trust is rebuilt, and we are united as the body of Christ. This ministry is central to life together—it is how we bear witness to the love and grace of God in our broken world.

Reflection Questions

- What fears or obstacles keep you from practicing confession?
- Is there someone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from?
- How can confession and forgiveness strengthen your relationships and your community?

May we embrace the ministry of confession and forgiveness, trusting in the power of God's grace to heal and restore.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Merciful God, you have called us to live in honesty, humility, and grace. Teach us to confess our sins and forgive one another, so that we may reflect your love and grow as a community of faith.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for your Church, that it may be a place where truth is spoken, forgiveness is given, and reconciliation is lived out. Help us to model the humility and grace of Christ.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are burdened by guilt or shame. Give them the courage to bring their sins into the light, trusting in your mercy and the support of your people.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for broken relationships in our communities, families, and the wider world. May your Spirit guide us to confess where we have caused harm and to forgive those who have wronged us. Bring healing and peace where there is division.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who struggle to forgive. Soften their hearts and remind them of your boundless grace, so they may find freedom in letting go of resentment and embracing love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for ministries like The Community of Saint Dysmas, where confession and forgiveness are lived out in powerful ways. Bless those who lead and participate in these ministries, that they may be witnesses of your reconciling love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up our own prayers, and the burdens of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Loving God, thank you for the gift of confession and forgiveness. Through your grace, restore us to one another and to you. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner. Now come as the sinner that you are to God who loves you."

Go forth today, embracing the power of confession and forgiveness. Bring your sins to the light, and offer forgiveness to those who seek it. In doing so, may you experience the freedom and unity that only Christ can bring.

Blessing

May the God of mercy lead you to confess with honesty, forgive with grace, and love with humility. May the Spirit of Christ strengthen your community as you walk together in truth and peace. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 8

Devotion: Daily Life as Worship

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Daily life becomes a service of worship when lived in fellowship with others, and when every action is done for God’s glory.”

Bonhoeffer reminds us that worship is not confined to Sunday mornings or special gatherings. Worship is a way of life. Every moment—whether we are at work, with family, or alone—can be an act of devotion to God.

When we live in Christian community, daily life becomes an opportunity to serve one another, honor God through our words and actions, and reflect the love of Christ to the world. Even the small, mundane tasks of life—washing dishes, greeting a neighbor, or listening to someone in need—become holy acts when done with gratitude and a heart turned toward God.

Today, let us reflect on how we can embrace the rhythms of daily life as worship, finding joy and meaning in the ordinary as we seek to glorify God in all we do.

Scripture Reading

- 1 Corinthians 10:31

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”

- Romans 12:1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer emphasizes that our daily lives are filled with opportunities to worship God. He writes:

“We do not simply praise God in hymns or prayers; we praise Him in our work, our rest, and in our relationships. Each day becomes a small offering, a living sacrifice of thanks to the One who has given us all.”

This perspective transforms how we see our time and tasks. When we view daily life as worship, every moment becomes significant. Serving a meal for our family becomes an act of love. Doing our work with integrity becomes a way to glorify God. Extending kindness to a stranger becomes a reflection of Christ’s love.

Living this way requires intentionality. It asks us to remain mindful of God’s presence in the ordinary. It also calls us to see our interactions with others—whether easy or challenging—as opportunities to practice love, patience, and grace.

Bonhoeffer also warns us against compartmentalizing our lives. Faith is not something we put on for Sunday morning and then set aside during the week. Instead, he calls us to integrate worship into every aspect of our lives, so that everything we do reflects our love for God and neighbor.

Reflect on these questions:

- How can you see your daily tasks as acts of worship?
- Are there areas of your life where you struggle to glorify God?
- How does viewing daily life as worship change your relationships and routines?

May we offer every moment of our lives as a living sacrifice to God, finding joy in serving Him in the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious and loving God, you have called us to worship you not just with our lips but with our lives. Help us to see every moment as an opportunity to glorify you.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for your Church, that it may model a life of daily worship, glorifying you in all things and serving as a beacon of hope in the world.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who struggle to find meaning in their daily lives. Open their hearts to see your presence in the ordinary, and remind them that their work, rest, and relationships are holy in your sight.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for communities, families, and workplaces, that they may be places of love, grace, and service. Help us to live out our faith in every interaction and task, bringing your light to the world.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those burdened by the demands of daily life. Give them strength and joy in their labor, and help them to see their efforts as a way to honor and serve you.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for ministries like The Community of Saint Dismas, where faith is lived out daily among those who seek hope and renewal. Bless their work and remind them that even small acts of service glorify your name.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts, and the concerns of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of daily life and for the privilege of offering it back to you in worship. May your Spirit guide us in all that we do. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"It is in the simple, routine tasks of life that God calls us to worship. Our faith is made real when we live it out in the everyday moments of life."

Go forth today with a renewed commitment to glorify God in everything you do. Whether through work, rest, or relationships, may your life reflect the love and grace of Christ.

Blessing

May the peace of Christ guide your heart, the joy of the Spirit fill your soul, and the love of God inspire your every action. Go in peace, and may your daily life be a song of worship to the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 9

Devotion: Solitude and Community as Complements

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.”

Bonhoeffer’s words remind us of the delicate balance between solitude and community. As Christians, we are called to both. Solitude draws us into the presence of God, where we can listen, reflect, and be renewed. Community connects us to one another, teaching us love, service, and forgiveness. Neither can fully thrive without the other.

Solitude prepares us for the work of community by grounding us in God’s love and truth. Community, in turn, enriches our solitude by giving us a shared purpose and a place to live out the fruits of our time with God. Together, they form a rhythm of life that strengthens our faith and deepens our relationships with God and one another.

Today, let us reflect on how solitude and community complement and sustain one another in our lives as followers of Christ.

Scripture Reading

- Mark 1:35

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

- Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer emphasizes that solitude and community are not opposites; they are two sides of the same coin. He writes:

“Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone, and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in fellowship.”

Solitude is not isolation. It is intentional time set apart to be with God, to reflect on His Word, and to listen for His voice. In solitude, we are reminded that our identity is not rooted in what we do for others or how we are perceived but in our relationship with God. It is a time to be renewed and centered in His love.

But if we remain in solitude too long, we risk losing sight of the communal nature of our faith. We are called to live in community, to serve, and to share life with others. Community is where we practice the love, patience, and humility that God teaches us in solitude. It is where we bear one another’s burdens and find encouragement in our shared journey of faith.

Bonhoeffer also warns against using community as an escape from ourselves or from God. Without solitude, we risk becoming overly dependent on others or distracted by the busyness of life. Without community, our solitude can become self-centered or detached from reality.

The key is balance. Solitude equips us to engage meaningfully in community, and community challenges us to deepen our solitude. Together, they form the foundation for a vibrant Christian life.

Reflection Questions

- How do you currently balance solitude with community in your life?
- Do you find it easier to engage in solitude or in community? Why?
- How can time in solitude strengthen your relationships in community, and vice versa?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Loving God, you have created us for both solitude and community. Help us to find the balance we need to grow in faith and live out your love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who struggle to find time for solitude. Help them to pause, reflect, and be renewed in your presence. May they draw strength and wisdom from time spent alone with you.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who feel isolated or lonely. Surround them with a loving community that reflects your grace and reminds them they are not alone.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for communities, both large and small, that they may be places of encouragement, love, and service. Strengthen the bonds between their members and guide them to live out their faith together.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who lead lives of deep solitude, such as contemplatives and those in prison. May they find your presence in their solitude and be connected to others through your Spirit.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up ministries like The Community of Saint Dismas, where solitude and community meet in powerful ways. Bless their work as they create spaces of fellowship and healing, even in places of confinement.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up our own prayers and the burdens of those we name now... (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: God, thank you for the gifts of solitude and community. Help us to live faithfully in both, glorifying you in all we do. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

“The day together will be unfruitful without the day alone, and the day alone will be unfruitful without the day together.”

As you go forth today, may you embrace the rhythm of solitude and community, finding renewal in God's presence and joy in fellowship with others. Let these two gifts sustain you in your journey of faith.

Blessing

May the stillness of God's presence in solitude bring you peace, and may the warmth of God's love in community give you strength. Go in peace, to live fully in both. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 10

Devotion: The Danger of Idealizing Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

“He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest.”

Bonhoeffer warns us against the temptation to idealize the concept of Christian community. When we become enamored with an idealized version of what community should be, we risk overlooking the real, lived experience of community, which includes conflict, imperfection, and struggle. Christian community is a place for growth and transformation, but it is not without its challenges.

The danger of idealizing community is that it blinds us to the messiness of real relationships. We may come to expect perfection from others and ourselves, leading to frustration, disappointment, and even disillusionment when things don't measure up. Bonhoeffer calls us to embrace the community as it is—imperfect and yet a place where God's grace is most visible.

Today, let us reflect on how we can avoid the trap of idealizing community and instead learn to love and serve one another with humility, understanding, and grace.

Scripture Reading

- Romans 12:10-13

“Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

- I Corinthians 12:25-27

“There should be no division in the body, but the members should have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer reminds us that Christian community is not about the ideal but about the real:

“Community is not something we create out of our own desires; it is a gift we receive from God. It is not perfect, but it is the place where we live out our faith in fellowship with others, bearing one another's burdens and growing together in love.”

When we idealize community, we set ourselves up for disappointment. We might dream of a church or a fellowship that is harmonious, without conflict, and filled only with like-minded individuals. Yet the reality is that community is a space for transformation, and transformation often requires friction. We are all in the process of becoming more like Christ, and this process is messy. It involves challenges, differences, and the need for forgiveness.

Idealizing community can also lead to unrealistic expectations, which can then cause us to become discouraged when things don't go according to plan. Bonhoeffer cautions that when we focus on a dream or ideal of what we think community should be, we can overlook the grace God offers us in the real, sometimes difficult, life of the community.

True Christian community isn't about perfection. It's about learning to love one another in the midst of imperfection. It's about recognizing that every member of the body—whether strong or weak, healthy or struggling—has a place and a purpose. Each member contributes something valuable, and together, we form the body of Christ.

When we let go of our idealized expectations and accept the community as it is, we open ourselves to deeper relationships, greater humility, and more authentic fellowship.

Reflection Questions

- What expectations do you have about community that may be unrealistic or idealized?
- How can you better embrace the imperfections of your community and learn from them?
- In what ways can you contribute to building authentic, grace-filled community?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of community, even though it is often difficult and imperfect. We confess that we sometimes long for an ideal community, forgetting that it is in the real, messy relationships where you work the most.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our communities, that we may not be blinded by unrealistic expectations, but that we may see each other as members of Christ's body—imperfect but precious. Help us to love one another as we are, with grace, patience, and understanding.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are struggling with conflict or division in their communities. May your peace reign, and may they find the strength to forgive, to reconcile, and to love in the midst of difficulty.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are seeking community but are disappointed by what they find. Help them to know that they are not alone, and lead them to places where they can experience authentic fellowship and love.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our church and for all Christian communities, that we may be places of grace, humility, and mutual love. Help us to build up one another, bearing each other's burdens and growing together in Christ.

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts and the needs of our world.

(Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord, help us to move beyond the dream of an ideal community and instead embrace the community You have given us—imperfect but full of grace. May we live together in love, forgiveness, and humility, reflecting the body of Christ in all we do. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Christian community is not a utopia; it is a place where we can practice love, patience, and grace.”

As you go forth today, remember that community is not about perfection, but about loving one another in our imperfections. Let us build up one another with grace and humility, knowing that it is in the real, messy relationships that God does His most transforming work.

Blessing

May the peace of Christ be with you in your community, may His grace fill your relationships, and may you find strength in both the joys and challenges of living together in the body of Christ. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 11

Devotion: The Practice of Gratitude

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks to the importance of gratitude in the Christian community. He writes: *“It is only through gratitude that we learn to see the grace of God in all things.”*

Gratitude is not just an attitude we have toward our blessings; it is a practice we engage in. It involves a conscious turning toward God, recognizing His presence and provision in all aspects of life. Gratitude helps us see not only the good in our own lives but also in the lives of those around us. It helps us remain grounded in the love of God and encourages us to share that love with others.

Bonhoeffer reminds us that community is a gift, and one that is not to be taken for granted. In the busyness of life and the struggles we face, we can forget to pause and express our thanks. But in doing so, we miss out on recognizing God’s daily blessings and the ways He is at work among us.

Today, let us reflect on the practice of gratitude and how it deepens our connection to God and to each other, both in community and in solitude.

Scripture Reading

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

- Colossians 3:15-17

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

Meditation

Gratitude is more than a feeling; it is a deliberate act of the will. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that true gratitude arises from seeing everything as a gift of God’s grace, whether it is joy or sorrow, abundance or lack. He writes:

“The Christian knows that he has received everything from God and must give thanks for everything, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be.”

This view of gratitude is not based on circumstances but on the recognition that God is at work in every situation. Even in hardship, we are reminded that God’s grace is sufficient, and His presence is constant. Gratitude becomes a way to counteract the tendency to complain or to focus on what we lack. It shifts our perspective toward the gifts God gives us daily—community, relationships, the breath in our lungs, the ability to serve.

In a Christian community, gratitude is essential. It builds unity and fosters a spirit of love and support. Bonhoeffer writes:

“In community, we are called to give thanks for one another, to recognize the presence of Christ in each other, and to offer ourselves as gifts to one another.”

This practice of mutual gratitude helps deepen our bonds and transform our relationships. When we focus on what we can give in love and appreciation rather than what we feel we lack, our community flourishes. Gratitude draws us closer to God and to each other.

Reflection Questions

- In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to be grateful?
- How can you practice gratitude in your community today?
- How might expressing gratitude change the way you experience your relationships?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Loving God, we come before you today with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of life, the gift of community, and the gift of Your endless love. We thank You for being present with us in every moment and for the ways You show up in both the joyful and challenging times.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We give thanks for the community of believers in our lives—our families, our churches, and our friends. May we learn to see Your grace in one another and practice the gift of mutual gratitude.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who struggle with thankfulness, whether because of hardship, loss, or disappointment. May Your Spirit remind them of the blessings that surround them, and may they find comfort in knowing that You are with them always.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our local churches and ministries, that they may cultivate a culture of gratitude and grace. May their members learn to support one another with open hearts, recognizing the goodness of God in one another.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are isolated or alone. May they experience Your presence and the love of community, even in their solitude. Help them find reasons to be grateful, even in difficult circumstances.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up those who serve in ministry, especially those in challenging environments like prisons and remote areas. May they feel the strength of gratitude for the work they do and the people they serve, and may they know they are not alone.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts and the needs of the world.

(Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Gracious God, thank you for the countless gifts you provide. Help us to live with hearts full of gratitude, turning our thanks into action as we serve one another in love. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

"In all things we are to be thankful, for it is in the simple practice of gratitude that we learn to see God's hand in our lives."

May we carry this practice of gratitude with us today, turning our hearts toward God's grace and recognizing the gifts He has given us, both large and small.

Blessing

May the peace of Christ fill your heart with gratitude, and may the love of God overflow in your relationships. Go in peace, giving thanks in all circumstances. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 12

Devotion: The Role of the Word of God in Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about the central role of the Word of God in the Christian community, emphasizing that the Bible is not merely a set of instructions or a collection of ancient writings but a living, active tool that binds believers together in truth and love. He notes that when the Word of God is proclaimed and received within the community, it becomes a means of grace that shapes relationships, strengthens faith, and deepens unity.

Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Word of God alone is the foundation of our community. We live and speak in community only because the Word has come to us and continues to come to us.”

In our church communities, both individually and collectively, the Word of God shapes how we understand one another, how we engage with the world, and how we grow in our faith. It is not simply a textbook or doctrine to be memorized; it is the living Word that speaks to us and through us. In community, it is through the Word that we find truth, healing, and transformation.

As we reflect on the role of the Word of God in community today, let us consider how Scripture shapes the way we live together, how it challenges and comforts us, and how it calls us to be more than just a gathering of individuals but a unified body in Christ.

Scripture Reading

- John 1:1-4

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

- Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

- Hebrews 4:12

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Meditation

The Word of God is the bedrock upon which our community is built. In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer stresses that the Word is not just for private reflection or personal edification—it is meant to be shared within the community. The community gathers around the Word, and the Word shapes its actions, attitudes, and beliefs.

When we gather together in community—whether in worship, in study, or in fellowship—the Word of God is central. It unites us, for it is not our own words or ideas that bind us together, but the eternal Word of God, which transcends our differences and forms us into a unified body. Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Word of God is not ours, but God’s Word is for us. It is in the community that we listen, hear, and respond to that Word.”

In community, we learn to listen to God's Word together. It becomes the foundation for our relationships with one another, and it guides us in how we should love, serve, and forgive each other. The Word of God is living and active, as Hebrews 4:12 reminds us. It speaks directly to our hearts, revealing our true selves, our weaknesses, and our sins. But it also offers healing, forgiveness, and a new way of living.

As Bonhoeffer emphasizes, the Word of God does not only speak to us individually; it speaks to us as a body. As the body of Christ, we are called to teach, admonish, and encourage one another through the Word. It is in the sharing of God's Word in community that we grow together in wisdom and understanding, as Paul encourages in Colossians 3:16.

Our community is a place where the Word is both spoken and lived. It is where we gather to hear God's promises, confess our sins, and be transformed by His grace. It is through the Word of God that we are made into a people who reflect His image and share His love with the world.

Reflection Questions

- How has the Word of God shaped your experience of community?
- In what ways can you be more intentional about sharing and living out the Word within your community?
- How can the Word of God bring healing and reconciliation in areas of division or conflict within your relationships?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of your Word, which is living and active among us. We praise you for the truth and wisdom you provide in Scripture, and for the ways your Word shapes and transforms us.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our communities, that we may be faithful to your Word. May we listen to it with open hearts and allow it to guide our actions, our relationships, and our worship. Help us to be a people who not only hear the Word but live it out in love and service to others.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who are struggling to hear or understand God's Word. May they find clarity, comfort, and strength in Scripture. We ask for the Holy Spirit to speak to them in their need and bring them into a deeper relationship with you.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the leaders of the church, that they may be faithful in proclaiming God's Word. May they be guided by the Holy Spirit and speak truth with love, pointing others to Christ as the Word made flesh.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those in our community who are experiencing conflict, division, or brokenness. May your Word bring healing and reconciliation, and may your love be evident in all our relationships.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for the world, that the message of Christ, the living Word, would spread to all corners of the earth. May your Word bring hope to the hopeless, light to the darkness, and peace to the troubled.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts and the needs of those we know and love. (Pause for silent or spoken prayers.)

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord, help us to always turn to Your Word for guidance, comfort, and strength. May we be a community built on the foundation of Your truth, living out Your love in every word, action, and relationship. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Word of God is the foundation of our community. It is through the Word that we are made into the people God intends us to be.”

As you go forth today, carry the Word of God in your heart, and let it shape your interactions and your relationships. May you be a vessel through which God's truth flows to those around you.

Blessing

May the Word of God dwell richly in you, guiding your thoughts, words, and actions. May His truth set you free, and may His love bind you together with others in the body of Christ. Go in peace. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 13

Devotion: Singing and Worshiping in Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects on the transformative role of singing and worship within the Christian community. He writes, “It is the voice of the Church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song.”

Bonhoeffer reminds us that singing in worship is a deeply communal act. It is not just an expression of individual faith but a collective declaration of God’s glory and our shared hope in Christ. When we sing together, our voices unite, transcending our personal struggles and differences, and we become one in praising our Creator. Singing becomes a way of embodying the unity we have in Christ, where the focus is not on our voices but on lifting our hearts together to God.

Singing as a community also strengthens our faith. The words we sing remind us of God’s promises, and the music stirs our souls, lifting us from despair and filling us with joy. Worshipful singing is both a gift we offer to God and a means by which He shapes and transforms us.

As we meditate on the importance of singing and worshiping in community, let us reflect on how these acts unite us, draw us closer to God, and allow us to proclaim His glory together.

Scripture Reading

- Psalm 100:1-2

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.”

- Ephesians 5:19-20

“Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer teaches that singing is a gift that unites us as a worshiping community. In a world that often focuses on individuality, communal singing reminds us that we are part of something greater than ourselves. When we join our voices together, we affirm that our faith is not a solitary journey but one that is shared with others in the body of Christ.

Singing allows us to express the inexpressible. When words fail to capture the depth of our gratitude, the beauty of creation, or the hope we have in Christ, music fills the gap. Singing together becomes a way to carry one another’s burdens, as the joyful uplift the weary, and the strong encourage the weak. It is a living expression of the mutual care and support that Bonhoeffer calls us to in Christian community.

Bonhoeffer also warns against singing for personal pride or performance. He reminds us that our singing is an act of service to God and one another. The focus is not on how well we sing, but on the truth of the words we proclaim and the unity of hearts lifted in praise.

Finally, communal singing connects us to the global and eternal Church. When we sing, we join our voices with Christians around the world and throughout history who have praised God with the same psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. It reminds us that we are part of the universal body of Christ, united in worship across time and space.

Reflection Questions

1. How has singing in worship strengthened your faith or helped you feel connected to your community?
2. What role does singing play in your personal expression of gratitude and joy to God?
3. How can you encourage others to experience the joy and unity of communal singing?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of music and the joy of singing together in worship. We praise you for the way singing unites our hearts and lifts our spirits, drawing us closer to you and to one another.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our worshiping communities, that they may always be places of joy, gratitude, and praise. May our songs glorify you and strengthen the bonds of love among us.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up those who feel disconnected or alone in their faith. May they find encouragement and belonging in the worshiping community, and may the songs of the Church bring them hope and peace.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for those who lead us in worship—for musicians, choir members, and worship leaders. May they be filled with your Spirit and inspire us to lift our voices in praise with joy and sincerity.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We remember those who cannot gather to worship due to illness, persecution, or hardship. May they find strength in the knowledge that they are still part of the body of Christ, united with us in spirit and song.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for the global Church, that our worship may be a witness to your love and a foretaste of the eternal praise we will offer in your presence. May our songs reach beyond the walls of our churches and touch the hearts of those who do not yet know you.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord, we offer these prayers to you with hearts full of gratitude and praise. May our lives be a song of worship, glorifying you in all that we do. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer reminds us: *“It is not you that sings; it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song.”*

As you go forth today, carry the song of the Church in your heart. Let your life be a melody of gratitude and joy, and may your worship be a witness to the love and unity we share as the body of Christ.

Blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May His Spirit fill your heart with joy and your lips with praise. May your song be a light to the world and a gift to God. Go in peace. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 14

Devotion: The Temporary Nature of Earthly Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that all earthly communities, no matter how meaningful or deep, are temporary. Christian fellowship on earth is a gift of grace, but it is not eternal in its earthly form. Bonhoeffer writes:

“The Christian, however, must bear in mind that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that can be taken from us any day—that the time still separating us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed.”

Earthly Christian community is a foretaste of the eternal fellowship we will share with God and all believers in the fullness of His Kingdom. Yet, because it is temporary, it is also fragile. This awareness can lead us to a deeper sense of gratitude for the people God has placed in our lives and the time we are given to share with them.

Understanding the temporary nature of earthly community helps us to hold one another with humility and grace. It reminds us that our relationships are not ours to control but are entrusted to us by God for a season. When we let go of idealizing community or expecting perfection from it, we can embrace it for what it truly is: a gift to cherish and a sign of the greater fellowship we will enjoy with Christ.

Today, let us reflect on the fleeting yet sacred nature of our earthly Christian communities and how they prepare us for the eternal communion to come.

Scripture Reading

- Hebrews 13:14

“For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”

- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

- John 14:2-3

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer’s reflections on the temporary nature of earthly community invite us to hold our relationships with both gratitude and open hands. He reminds us that earthly Christian community is a gift from God—one that can be taken away at any moment. This reality is not meant to fill us with fear or sorrow but to deepen our appreciation for the time we have together.

We often place high expectations on our communities, desiring them to meet all our spiritual, emotional, and social needs. But Bonhoeffer warns against idolizing community. He writes that when we demand perfection from our fellow believers, we risk damaging the very fellowship we seek. True Christian community flourishes when we accept its imperfections and recognize that it is ultimately sustained by God, not by us.

The temporary nature of earthly community also points us to something greater: the eternal fellowship we will share in the presence of God. Every shared meal, every hymn sung together, and every moment of prayer in community is a foretaste of the joy we will experience in the fullness of God's Kingdom. While our earthly gatherings are imperfect and fleeting, they prepare us for the eternal communion to come, where all divisions will cease, and all relationships will be perfected in Christ.

This understanding calls us to cherish the gift of community while we have it, to serve one another with humility, and to extend grace to those around us. It also encourages us to live with hope, knowing that even when earthly communities end, the bond we share in Christ will never be broken.

Reflection Questions

1. How does recognizing the temporary nature of earthly community change how you approach your relationships within it?
2. In what ways can you cherish and serve the community God has given you today?
3. How does the promise of eternal fellowship with Christ give you hope when earthly relationships end?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Gracious and eternal God, we thank you for the gift of Christian community, which reflects your love and grace in our lives. We praise you for the relationships we share and the fellowship that strengthens our faith.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for our communities, that we may cherish them as gifts from you. Help us to serve one another with humility, extend grace in times of conflict, and always seek to glorify you in our relationships.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up those who feel isolated or disconnected from Christian fellowship. May they find comfort in your presence and be drawn into loving communities where they can grow in faith and belonging.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for communities facing division or struggle. May your Spirit bring healing, unity, and a renewed sense of purpose, reminding them of their shared hope in Christ.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We remember those who have lost loved ones or experienced the end of meaningful relationships. Comfort them with the promise of eternal communion with you and all believers in your Kingdom.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for the global Church, that it may reflect the unity of your Kingdom and be a witness to your love in the world. May our communities, though temporary, point others to the eternal hope we have in you.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord, we offer these prayers with grateful hearts, trusting in your promise to bring us into perfect fellowship with you and one another in your eternal Kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer reminds us: *“Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”*

As you go forth today, may you cherish the community God has placed in your life. Serve one another with humility, hold your relationships with gratitude, and live in the hope of the eternal fellowship that awaits us in Christ.

Blessing

May the God of grace sustain your relationships, the Spirit of unity guide your actions, and the promise of eternal communion with Christ fill you with peace and hope. Go in love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Devotion 15

Devotion: The Responsibility of the Individual in the Community

Opening Reflection

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Christian community is a divine gift, but it also demands intentional responsibility from each member. He writes, “Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship.”

Bonhoeffer reminds us that the health and vitality of any community depend on the commitment of its individual members to serve, love, and bear responsibility for one another. Christian community is not a passive experience. It is an active calling, requiring each person to listen, support, and put the needs of others before their own.

This responsibility begins with humility and a willingness to see others as Christ sees them. It calls us to patience when others fall short, to forgiveness when we are wronged, and to service even when it is inconvenient. Bonhoeffer’s words challenge us to reject selfishness and instead take seriously the role God has given each of us to help build up the body of Christ.

Today, let us reflect on how we can faithfully fulfill our individual responsibilities within the Christian community, seeking to glorify God and serve others in love.

Scripture Reading

- Galatians 6:2

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

- Philippians 2:3-4

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

- Romans 12:4-5

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

Meditation

Bonhoeffer challenges us to embrace our God-given role within the Christian community with humility, love, and responsibility. As individuals, we are part of a larger whole—the body of Christ—and each of us has a vital part to play.

Living responsibly in community begins with humility. We must recognize that no one among us is perfect, and no one is self-sufficient. Bonhoeffer reminds us that we need one another. The strong must support the weak, and the weak must allow themselves to be supported. This mutual care reflects the heart of Christ, who bore our burdens and calls us to do the same for one another.

At the same time, responsibility within the community calls us to action. It is not enough to simply exist in community—we are called to actively serve. This means showing up for one another, listening with compassion, and offering forgiveness when conflict arises. It also means speaking truth in love, helping others grow in faith, and accepting correction with grace.

Bonhoeffer warns us, however, against seeking recognition for our service. True responsibility in community flows from a spirit of love and obedience to God, not a desire for praise or control. He writes, “*Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us because we do not give thanks for daily gifts.*”

As we reflect on Bonhoeffer’s words, let us ask ourselves: How can I better serve my community? Where am I called to take responsibility, even when it is difficult? And how can I reflect Christ’s love in my actions toward others?

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are you currently contributing to your Christian community? How might God be calling you to do more?
2. How do you respond when others in your community fall short of expectations? Do you show grace, or do you hold resentment?
3. Are there areas in your life where you struggle to accept responsibility? How can you grow in humility and service?

Intercessory Prayer

Leader:

Loving and gracious God, you have called us to live in community with one another as the body of Christ. You have given each of us unique gifts and responsibilities to serve and build one another up. Help us to faithfully live out this calling.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for humility within our communities, that we may see one another as you see us—broken yet beloved—and offer grace when we fall short. Teach us to bear one another’s burdens with love and patience.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We lift up those who feel isolated or overlooked in their communities. May they experience your presence through the care and responsibility of others. Empower us to reach out to those in need with compassion and understanding.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We pray for wisdom in fulfilling our responsibilities within the body of Christ. Help us to serve not out of pride or obligation, but out of love for you and for one another.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

We remember the leaders in our churches and communities. Strengthen them as they carry the burdens of guiding others. May we support them with prayer, encouragement, and active participation in the life of the Church.

Response:

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader:

Lord, remind us of the beauty and responsibility of living in community. Help us to faithfully serve one another and glorify you in all that we do, knowing that our love for others reflects your love for us. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Closing Charge

Bonhoeffer writes, *"We are bound together by faith, not by experience. Jesus Christ stands between the lover and the others he loves."*

As you go forth today, remember that God has placed you in your community for a purpose. Embrace your role with humility and love, serving others as Christ has served you. Know that even small acts of kindness and responsibility help to build up the body of Christ and reflect the glory of God to the world.

Blessing

May the Lord bless you with the strength to carry the burdens of others, the humility to accept help when needed, and the grace to live in love and service within your community. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

NOTES

Conclusion

As we conclude this journey through *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer leaves us with a powerful vision of what it means to live as the body of Christ. Christian community is not a human achievement but a divine gift—a reality rooted in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. It is in Him that we are united, and through Him that we are called to live humbly, serve faithfully, and love sacrificially.

Bonhoeffer reminds us that the life we share as believers is not without challenges. The imperfections of others, and indeed our own, are opportunities for grace. The call to bear one another's burdens, to listen with empathy, and to forgive as Christ forgives is not easy, but it is the path of discipleship. In the messiness of human relationships, we encounter the sanctifying work of God, shaping us into His likeness.

At the heart of Christian community is the Word of God, guiding us, convicting us, and drawing us closer to Christ and to one another. Prayer and worship anchor our fellowship, reminding us that we are dependent on God in all things. Whether in solitude or togetherness, we find our identity and purpose in Him.

Bonhoeffer also offers a sober reminder: the earthly community we cherish is temporary. It points us to the eternal fellowship we will one day experience fully in the presence of God. Until that day, we live as pilgrims, seeking to embody the love of Christ in a broken world.

As we part ways with Bonhoeffer's profound reflections, may we carry forward his vision of a life together rooted in grace, humility, and service. May we walk in gratitude for the gift of community, holding fast to the hope that binds us—the unchanging love of Christ. And may we continue to live each day as worship, striving to reflect the kingdom of God in our shared lives, until we are finally gathered as one in His eternal presence.