



Connecting Heart to Heart

Part III: Building Bridges *by Sharon Rapp*

How wide the love of Christ! It knows not class or race
But holds our one humanity Within its broad embrace.
How long the love of Christ! Its patience will not cease
Until this broken world is bound In everlasting peace.
How high the love of Christ! Beyond all thought it soars,
And yet upon our passing lives Unmeasured mercy
pours. How deep the love of Christ, Descending to a cross!
He bears within His wounded hands All human
pain and loss. All praise to You, O Christ, For love whose depth and height,
Whose length and breadth fill time and space
With endless life and light! “How Wide the Love of Christ” (LSB #535, stanzas 1–5)

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, teach me to respond to the question “How shall they hear?” with the knowledge that Your Great Commission includes all I meet in “to all the world.” Lamb of God who died for all, grant me forgiveness for missed opportunities and courage to be bold in those ahead. Holy Spirit, enable me to answer the question “Whom shall I send?” with a heart full of “Here am I. Send me!” Amen.

Opening Activity

Discuss with a partner or small group the following situation. A family in your congregation is excited about plans and preparations for hosting an exchange student for the secondary school year. The Sunday after pick up at the airport, the congregation holds an end-of-summer picnic, and the new student and host family attend. During the meal time, you notice a couple of preteens whispering and discover that they are marveling at the international guest — who is trying to cut corn off the cob with a table knife and fork. When you mention that both the chicken and the vegetable may be held with the hands at an outdoor event, she shakes her head “no” and appears shocked at your suggestion. How do you help to bridge the gap between her table rules and ours? Between the preteens and a new member of the church family?

The Focus of Part III of our study is twofold. First, we are reminded that all of us have sinned and that the Gospel invitation is to be taken to all people and cultures. Then, we rejoice in our adoption through faith into the unity of one body, Christ’s Church. With these goals in mind, let us explore Scripture.

All Sinners, All Invited

Read **Luke 15:2**. To whom is the Great Redeemer’s outreach here? _____

There is one common culture that we all share. We are all sinful and need forgiveness. *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:22b–23)*. Fortunately for us, *God does not judge by external appearance (Galatians 2:6)*, because *all our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)*. Fortunately for us, *God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11)*. Fortunately for us, “*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17)*.”

List some of the words and phrases used in the New Testament to indicate that God’s love and mercy are impartial and universal.

Mark 16:15 _____

Acts 1:8 _____

Luke 3:6 _____

Romans 10:12–14 _____

Luke 24:47 _____

Galatians 2:9–10 _____

John 4:14 _____

1 John 5:1 _____

Read **Revelation 14:6**. To whom is the Gospel to be proclaimed?

Read **1 Timothy 2:3–6**. Why must we speak the Good News to all?

So it has been from Jesus' birth: shepherds, angels, wise men. Simeon, through the power of the Holy Spirit, recognized the Lord's Christ and praised God in the temple courts: "For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people," and Anna gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem (**Luke 2:25–38**).

All Adopted, One Body

Read **Ephesians 1:4–8**. By what process does a person become the child of God?

Read **Romans 8:15–17**. What blessings belong "to those who are led by the Spirit of God"?

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:12–13**).* If time allows, see also: **Acts 2:21; Romans 8:23 and 9:4; 2 Corinthians 6:18**.

Read **Ephesians 1:22–23**. Who is Christ's body?

Read **Romans 12:4–8**. How does this body function? If time allows, see also: **1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Colossians 1:24–28**.

Read **Colossians 2:2–5**. Why is unity vital from a practical standpoint?

From a spiritual standpoint?

Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.* Jesus Himself asks the Father, in **John 17:23:** "May they [believers] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Closing

God has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to prepare us for works of service *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:13). May we be willing and eager to be transformed to the likeness of Jesus to witness and to share the Good News of the source of our salvation with all whom we meet.

Say or sing together: "Alabaré – II" (LSB #800); "Hark, the Voice" (LSB #826, LW #318, TLH #496); or the Peter Scholtes praise song, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

Closing Prayer

Father of all who believe, remind us to see new cultures as opportunities, not walls that separate. Good Shepherd, we know that this is Your way. Lead us as we walk in it and seek to be Your faithful witnesses. Holy Spirit, keep us in the unity of our adoption. Grant us power, love, and self-discipline that we may not be afraid or ashamed to speak the Gospel to all and tell of the grace we have received through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We ask these things in His name. Amen.

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NOTE: Connecting Heart to Heart Parts I & II were published in the Fall 2013 LWQ and are available online.

For Further Study, Discussion, Reflection, and/or Action

- Practice speaking of your faith (elevator speech) with one or more members of your Bible study group.
- Identify one or more bridges that you will begin to build toward those God has brought into your life.
- Enjoy the poems "Hug O'War" and "No Difference" by Shel Silverstein, published in his book *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Harper Collins 1974).
- Read the children's book *And to Think That We Thought We'd Never Be Friends* by Mary Ann Hoberman. (Crown Books 1999; Dragonfly Books 2003).
- Try learning some words and/or phrases in another language. There are sites on the Internet that provide limited, basic instruction. Some libraries have travel courses available for check-out, and most bookstores sell mini-courses. While many towns provide introductory courses through adult education, it is not necessary that this be a full-fledged course to experience a sense of what is involved in becoming fluent in another language.