



"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." - Hebrews 12:1-2

Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." - 1 Corinthians 13:12

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." - Hebrews 10: 23-25

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas, where I felt like one of three Lutherans at my large high school (one of whom was my brother) in a city that felt 49% Baptist and 49% Catholic to me at the time. (None of these things were true, and I knew that, but it sure felt like it.)

When I was a sophomore, my church went to the LCMS Youth Gathering in New Orleans. As I sat in the Superdome and confessed the Apostle's Creed with thousands of Christians my age who also knew the creed and confessed it every Sunday, I was overwhelmed with a sense of community. None of my friends confessed the Creeds in worship weekly outside of my church. I couldn't believe so many Christians believed what I believe, worshiped the way I worship, and were also in high school. I had no idea I was part of such a large community. The experience completely changed my perspective. I had felt alone as a Lutheran Christian, now I felt united with strangers I'd never met. Even though I didn't know them personally, I knew deep down I was united to each of them through Christ.

Our Christian community that spans times and crosses oceans truly does unite us here and now. But it is only partially realized on this side of heaven. Jesus knows us fully, even now, but our closest community only knows us in part; and as good as it feels to truly know someone, right now, we can only know others, even those we are closest to, in part. In heaven, our unity will be perfect, and our community will be fully realized. We shall know fully, even as we have been fully known by the creator who made us, redeemed us, sanctifies us, and knows us inside and out—literally.

We know Communion unites us in Jesus Christ where we receive forgiveness of sins. The thousands that are at the LCMS Youth Gathering is just a tiny fraction of all those who will be with us in eternity. It is hard to imagine, but we trust God's promises. We look forward to the ultimate banquet feast in heaven, when we are with Jesus face to face.

When I have daily struggles and feel alone, I am encouraged by the cloud of Christian witnesses, given community in my family and church by Jesus. I know I am not alone in my faith, and neither are you. We can look ahead to the fulfillment of all needs, including community, in heaven.

Questions/Journal

- Think about a time when you met with a group of believers that encouraged you, or stirred you up to love and good works in Jesus' name
- How or where do I see Christian community in my church?

Prayer

Jesus, I repent of all my sins. Thank you for your forgiveness. Holy Spirit, I need your companionship. Thank you for my Christian friends. Thank you for my family. Thank you for my church. Bless us together when we receive your body and blood. Strengthen us with your grace and forgiveness and mercy and very self, and also with unity in You. In Jesus' name, Amen