

October 4, 2026

Philippians 3:4-14 “One Table”

Remember the days when résumés were simple? A résumé is defined as a short one-to-two-page summary of a person's professional background, educational qualifications, and key skills. Here's another way to look at it -- it's a *personal marketing tool* for job seekers to convince hiring managers they're worthy of an interview. I was taught that if you want a good job, you got to write a good résumé. Here's how we *used* to write a résumé: Start with the last job you had and work your way backward. And remember, you're trying to get the attention of the people you want to work for, so you *have to* be creative about your job titles.

Did you have a paper route? Well then, you were a media distribution specialist. Okay, fancy title, but how are you supposed to highlight your skills and accomplishments? You say, “Successfully managed localized physical content networks with a 99% early-morning delivery rate.” Were you a barista at a coffee shop? No you weren't. You were a thermal culinary technician, and you facilitated rapid, custom orders under extreme morning-rush pressure while managing complex stakeholder preferences.

But is that really enough? No? Well, some folks would use fancy paper. Others would use what *they* thought were sophisticated fonts. You did whatever you could to set yourself apart from others. You already know these potential employers will throw out résumés with typos. And sure, that will cut down on the competition a little, because you know there's going to be people out there who aren't careful about things like spelling. But that still leaves quite a few candidates for the employer to choose from. If you can just find a clever way to get their attention, you might have a better chance. But employers caught on to this and started hiring screeners. They were getting frustrated because they weren't judging a beauty contest. They just wanted to know who was qualified for the job.

About that time, word processors like Word Perfect and Microsoft Word included résumé templates based on the latest trends. You could either drop it off to your potential employee or upload it to the job application site. These days, many employers don't even bother with résumés. They include the information that they want from you directly in the online application form. Why? Because they don't want to deal with fluff – they just want to know whether applicants are qualified or not.

In our scripture this morning, we get a glimpse of what sounds like a résumé in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. To give you a little background, the Apostle Paul was *not* one of the 12 apostles who were with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Saul of Tarsus as he was also known, was a Pharisee, the dominate expression of Judaism during his time. The Pharisees thought that the early followers of Jesus, who were called "The Way," were a dangerous cult threatening the survival of Israel. Saul was sent north to Damascus to persecute Christians in that region. On his way there, he had an up-close and personal encounter with the voice of Jesus. Not only did he become a follower of Christ, but he was given the authority of an apostle and started proclaiming the gospel as Paul. He went on to establish several churches in the northern Mediterranean territories of the Roman Empire, including the church of Philippi. And he *loved* these people. His letter to the Philippians, which was written when Paul was imprisoned, is one of the few letters he wrote that didn't include harsh criticism for the way they were doing things. It's also my favorite among Paul's epistles.

So why does Paul feel like he has to share this "religious résumé" with a church that already knew and trusted him? Surely the Philippians already knew about his ancestry, his education, and his accomplishments. I don't think that Paul was just telling people what they already knew. I believe that he was trying to tell these folks that his religious accomplishments aren't possessions that entitle him to God's favor. They are, in fact, secondary to knowing Christ.

So how often do we think our religious accomplishments define us or distinguish ourselves from everybody else? I don't know if this is the case in American Baptist tradition, but we Disciples have this annoying obsession about our religious pedigrees. I discovered the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) when I went to Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. I had already come to faith my junior year of high school, but I hadn't found a church yet. When I discovered that the Disciples encouraged me to ask questions and didn't require me to check my brain at the door, I knew I found a church home. But the way people introduced themselves before a public speaking engagement drove me crazy. "Hi, I'm Janet and I'm a fourth-generation Disciple." Or, "Hi, I'm Ed and I'm a fifth-generation Disciple." I was waiting for the whole room to say, "Hi Ed!" because I felt like I was in a 12-step meeting. So I asked someone why this was a thing. He said, "Well, the Disciples are the first American-born Protestant denomination, so people are proud of being able to trace their roots back to our founders." I said, "So what am I?" Because I wondered what I should say if I had to speak publicly. "Hi, I'm Jesse and I've been a Disciple for eight weeks?" "No," my friend assured me, "you're a first-generation Disciple." It sounded weird to me because I thought, "So are these people saying they inherited their faith?" I felt like I had no way of "leveling up."

But then I discovered that this wasn't the case at all. They weren't bragging about it ... well, maybe a little. They were setting up to talk about what their faith meant to them and how the Disciples of Christ helped them get where they are now. It was kind of like how Paul framed his "résumé" in Philippians. But he said, "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ." So what does that mean? Is he just throwing his résumé out the window? Is he disowning his Jewish heritage? Is he saying that his education and his religious formation were meaningless? No. Those experiences *shaped* him. Just like how being a "fourth generation" Disciple or a lifelong Baptist can be a meaningful part of our identity.

When he says, “whatever gains I had, I have regarded them as loss” he’s challenging the idea that ancestry, religious observance, and accomplishments have *anything* to do with our standing with God. His identity is now rooted in Christ. So it is also for those of us in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the American Baptist Church.

Here’s something from the American Baptist’s identity statement: **“We are called in loyalty to Jesus Christ to proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit, the Good News of God’s reconciling grace, and to declare the saving power of the Gospel to every human being and to every human institution. We celebrate Christ’s charge to make disciples of all nations and to bear witness to God’s redeeming reign in human affairs.”**

And from the Disciples affirmation of faith – **“We confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world. In Christ’s name and by his grace, we accept our mission of witness and service to all people.”**

Here and now on this World Communion Sunday, two congregations with different histories and traditions gather around the same table. Around the world, Christians with vastly different customs, languages and theological perspectives do likewise. We bring our histories to the table, but our histories aren't what earn us a place here. We’re not here because of what we've accomplished. We’re here because of the grace we've received. Because there is no résumé required at this table. Nobody is going to ask how many generations your family has been in the church. Nobody is going to ask whether you’re a Disciple or a Baptist, how much scripture you know, how many committees you’ve served on, or how many Sundays you’ve spent sitting in a pew. Those things may be part of our story. They may even be *important parts* of our story. But they aren’t what gets us a seat at the table.

And maybe that’s what I want us to take home with us today. If Christ

doesn't require a résumé from us before making room at his table, maybe *we* ought to stop requiring one from everybody else. Because we do that sometimes. We want people to qualify for our compassion. We want them to earn our respect. We want to know what they believe, or what they've done, or what mistakes they've made. We want to know whether they agree with us, or whether they're one of "us" or one of "them." We want to look over their résumé before we decide whether there's room for them. But that's not how grace works. We didn't *earn* our place at this table. We were *invited*. And if Christ has made room for us, then maybe following Christ means making room for somebody else.

Paul says, "I want to know Christ." That's where all of this finally leads. Not to a better religious résumé. Not to proving that our tradition is better than somebody else's. Not even to proving that we've finally figured everything out. Paul already admits he hasn't: "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on." Maybe that's what we're doing here today. We haven't arrived. Baptists haven't arrived. Disciples haven't arrived. The Church hasn't arrived. But we're still pressing on, still learning, still growing, still trying to understand what it means to follow Jesus. But while we're on the journey, Christ gives us a table. *One* table where there's room for all of us.