

Family

By [William H. Willimon](#)

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It didn't take our new governor long to stumble with his comment that if you haven't accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, "You're not my brother and you're not my sister, and I want to be your brother." It took the governor a long time to apologize, saying he didn't mean to offend. I've heard from lots of United Methodists who are not so much offended by the governor's remarks as concerned that he - perhaps unintentionally - misrepresented the Christian faith.

While I'm glad that our dermatologist governor wants to be our brother in Christ, I want to assure him that, in Christ, *we already are brothers*. Christians don't only accept Christ, *Wesleyan* Christians want to *obey* Christ and one way we obey Christ is by regarding those who once were strangers as our kin.

A number of United Methodists (many of whom say they are political supporters of the governor) have expressed dismay at his comments. Aside from noting the gap between our new governor's rather irenic Inaugural Address and these comments in the setting of a church, I feel a need to clarify that Christians do not view someone as "brother" or "sister" on the basis of that person's alleged faith commitments or personal virtues but rather on the basis of what we know of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has taught us to pray, "*Our* Father," which naturally requires us to regard all children of the Father as siblings.

Christians don't regard others as our brothers and sisters because they are members of our church, they affirm our creed, or because they are nice

people. We relate to others as Jesus has related to us - making us brothers and sisters, not by virtue of who we are but on the basis of who he is.

As a Methodist preacher I know nothing of governing or dermatology. All I really know for sure is that God so loved *the world* (including those who, in my sin, I have yet to recognize as my sisters and brothers), that God gave us his Son who has a considerably more expansive definition of family than those in my political party, biological family, or church. I wouldn't have known that my fellow citizens of Alabama are my brothers and sisters if Jesus Christ had not known me.

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