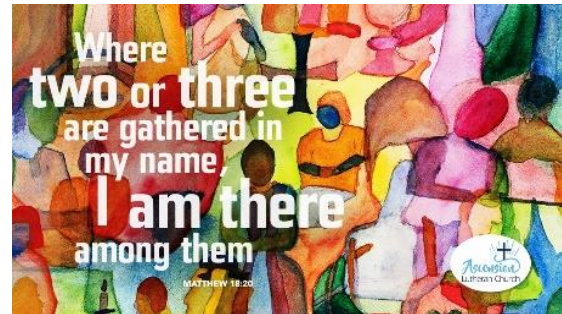


YOU BELONG TO CHRIST

It's rally day here at Ascension. We could all probably use our own personal rally day.

- To "rally" means to recover in health, spirits, or energy especially after a setback or loss.
- It also means to come together, unified, rallied around a central vital purpose.



Remember 2019? Just 2 years ago but it was the year before COVID hit.

- It seems like ancient history.
- Does 2019 feel to you like a different world? It was.
- How do we rally now in this hard world that has descended upon us?

Here's one thing I know, we need each other. We need to rally around being the best selves we can be for each other, to be a people united something greater than the divisions that have divided the world around us, to be a people for each other not against each other.

- Come to think of it, that sounds a lot like the kingdom of God Jesus was always talking about.
- That sounds a lot like the church Jesus said he was going to build, the one that even the gates of Hell would not prevail against. Let's rally to keep on being that church.

Our worship theme for the first part of this fall is "belonging." One of the things that has taken a big hit for a lot of people this past year-and-a-half of pandemic and pandemonium as been our sense of belonging. The reasons are many.

- There was that long stretch of staying home to be safe.
- We discovered Zoom and online connections, and thank the Lord we had all that, but we also discovered it's not the same as actually being together in person, and we need others.
- It was so good to return to some measure of in-person living again, yet we're still struggling with the challenge of how to be together but to do so safely, or as safely as possible now.
- But many people still haven't recovered from the emotional trauma of those long months of isolation. We discovered that distance didn't make the heart grow fonder after all.
- This has been true for us as a church as well, we've been worshiping in person at Ascension since way back in April, but some still haven't recovered their sense of belonging from those pre-vaccine days when the pandemic had us closed to being in-person.

Moreover, our society is still so polarized and politicized on so many issues, and the resulting often hurtful divide in our society has also been like an acid on that sense of "easy belonging" we used to have.

- Our sense of belonging has eroded especially in those places and relationships in which we have chosen to make our sense of belonging dependent upon everyone else thinking like we do on some particular matter.

- That's a game you can't win but in which you can make everyone lose, yourself included.

Dear Christian, know and feel and believe this, that the most powerful belonging you can have, whether in this world or the next, is a belonging you already have and that cannot be taken: You belong to Christ Jesus!

- 1 Corinthians 3:23, "You belong to Christ." God's Word says it; it is so!
- That is your first belonging. That is your saving belonging.
- Cling to it like a lifeline in a raging flood because it is.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us rally to Christ. Jesus is the one who unites us more powerfully than the world divides us.

- Because you belong to Christ, you also belong to the body of Christ, which is the church.
- We are your church. You are one of us. Please don't turn your back on this belonging.

Yes, these are troubled times. But the times are always troubled in one way or another. Meanwhile, we've got work to do. We've got a mission to accomplish. We have a future to build, yes even now.

- We have children who need to learn the faith, who need to develop their own more personal relationship with Christ, who need to discover the joy and life-changing power of being connected to friends who are also friends in Christ.
- We have adults who need to discover and experience those same things.
- We have a world that so needs the love of God and the good news of the gospel.

I enjoy having conversations with random people, like at the Y where I'm a regular lap swimmer. Last week I was talking to one of the young workers there and asked, "So, who are you apart from your job here?" She said, "What?"

- I said, "You know...are you a reader or play music? Are you into something interesting?"
- She looked at me with a face that seemed to be saying, "You're a strange person."
- But then she said very thoughtfully, "My thing is that I find joy and meaning in being devoted to the Lord." She said it with a joyful spirit and peace. She was talking about Jesus. She had no idea who I was, or if I was a Christian, or that I am a pastor.
- I then asked her if she belonged to a church, and she happily told me about the Catholic church she belongs to.
- One of the things that impressed me is that she talked first about Jesus, and only later about her church. Belonging to Jesus is always the first and more important thing.
- "Who are you?" I asked. "I belong to Christ," she said.

So let me ask you now, who are you? Who do you belong to?

- May your first belonging be to Christ Jesus.
- May you also find your belonging here among us, your church.

Amen.