

YOU BELONG TO THE FAITH OF THE APOSTLES.

This fall our worship theme has been Belonging.

- Belonging is a fundamental human need, critical to emotional happiness and health.
- One of the loneliest experiences you can have is being in a room full of people and feeling like you don't belong.
- There are brain studies that show our neural reactions to feelings of not belonging are very similar to that of actual physical pain. It's real pain.
- Your heart will be restless or worse until you find your belonging.

Conversely, some of the most powerful and healing experiences you can have are those moments of feeling deep belonging:

- "These are my people." "Here is my place." "This is my God." "I belong here."

I saw a study in a psychological journal that talked about two kinds of belonging.

- One they called "Deficit Reduction Belonging."
- It's the pursuit of belonging in order to fix something, to fill holes where there shouldn't be holes - in our heart, soul, and relationships.
- Something critical to personal development or well-being is missing (father-love, mother-love, self-love, self-worth, safety itself), and a person will seek almost any kind of belonging in order to fill some of those voids.

But beware; there some kinds of belonging that will do you more harm than good. Don't fill your emotional holes with empty or godforsaken things that will harm you even more and lead you from bad to worse. The Bible warns against this. Instead, let Christ be your healing.

The other kind of belonging that study named as "Growth Belonging."

- This is the kind of belonging that is doing more than healing past hurts, it's making us better and pulling us upwards to the higher things.
- But again, beware, because there are many false goods and false gods out there.
- Be sure to align your growth-belonging to that which is truly good and truly of God.

What about you?

- Of the various people, groups, and traditions to which you have belonged, which are the most important to you? In what way are they important?
- Do any provide long-term growth-belonging that helps you be a better person?
- Or are they mostly about self-glorification or ultimately pretty shallow purposes?

Your activity groups, your youth sports teams, your extra-curriculars – for as fun and even important as all that is, all those will pass so quickly into past memory once you move on to the next stage of life.

- Seek first to belong to that which does not pass away, to that which will make you a better person for the entirety of your life in this world and lift you into the eternity beyond.
- Seek above-all that which is above-all.
- Seek God and the kingdom of God first. I bet there will still be enough play time after that, but you won't be trying to draw your life identity from such shallow stuff.

I remind you, dear Christian, that your belonging of most importance is your belonging to Christ Jesus. This is the belonging that matters above all, the belonging that both heals and better.

Yet even here, careful discernment is needed, for as Jesus said, *"Many will come in my name."*

- But they won't be the real Jesus.
- There are many false gospels out there.
- As the Apostle Paul warns in Galatians 1:8, *"Even if we ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!"*
- There is no salvation in a false gospel.

The true faith of Christ, the actual Christian Gospel, is the one that has come to us from Jesus and through the witness of Jesus' apostles.

- This is what the word "apostolic" means when we confess that we believe in "The one, holy, catholic, and APOSTOLIC church."
- We're saying we belong to the faith and the faith tradition of the Apostles themselves.

The apostolic faith is what the New Testament is. The New Testament is the written record of the Apostles and of the Apostolic faith. Writings not included were not apostolic.

- The four Gospels are all from the eyewitness accounts of the apostles, especially from the apostles Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul.
- Acts and all the epistles likewise arise either directly from the Apostles or were written by those accepted as authorized to translate or write on behalf of the Apostles.

Over time, and even very quickly, however, false interpretations or additions were attempted. But the New Testament itself warns us many times to remain faithful to the true Apostolic faith.

- Ephesians 2 describes how we belong to *"the household of God"* that is, *"built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone."*
- In 2 Thessalonians 2 we are warned and encouraged, *"stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter."*
- Again, the New Testament is largely a collection of these same apostolic letters.
- So along with the doctrine of inspiration, we also have this very historical grounding in these New Testament scriptures being apostolic.

Even more, what came to us from the apostles came first to them from Jesus, and even Jesus himself claims what came from him came first from God the Father himself.

- In John 8 we read how Jesus said, *“I speak these things as the Father instructed me.”*
- Jesus laid out clearly the need to be faithful to this particular faith tradition, *“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.”*
- Notice the *“if.”*
- It’s very sobering, but Jesus also laid this out pretty clearly just a few verses earlier, *“You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.”*

But fear not for you do belong to the true Apostolic faith.

- This is the gospel that we continually preach here, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the Apostles, the gospel of the Bible, the saving gospel, the true gospel.
- Your heart will be restless or worse until you find your spiritual belonging in God.
- May your belonging be first and most to Jesus Christ, and to his true Gospel.
- Welcome home to where you belong.

Amen.