

Introduction: You Belong Here

We all want to belong to something. We know what it's like to be left out and not belong. Maybe we were always picked last at recess in school. Maybe we weren't in the in crowd in high school or college, maybe the boss never seems to talk with us like he does with the other employees, maybe the employees never seem excited to talk with us like they do with each other.

We all know that not belonging hurts. We want to belong and be a part of something and when we don't have that we feel like something is missing.

Wanting to belong is something that can be very good. God wants us to belong in the right way. This morning as we look at belonging, we will see that God wants you to belong here, with him, in his Word.

Sermonette 1: God Has Chosen You for Something Special

Scripture Lesson: Ephesians 1: 3-7, 11-14

We make choices every day. You can choose what to wear in the morning, what kind of car you want to drive, what career you want to pursue, where you want to go on the vacation. But sometimes those choices can be very difficult, especially when we have lots of choices. One of the hardest choices that my wife and I make is where we want to go out for lunch. It never seems like we can agree. Usually, in the end, she will say, why don't you pick then. And I will say, no you pick. It's almost easier when someone makes the choice for you.

That's what God did for you. He chose something very special for you that you would have never thought of wanting or needing: to have faith in Jesus and be saved. This choice was made before you were even born. In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul shows us God's grace and mercy in all of its splendor by showing us God's loving choice to give us a place to belong.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, ...

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Paul speaks pure Gospel. There is no Law here. He speaks this Gospel directly to the heart of the broken sinner who is repentant of their many sins. He speaks to people like you and me who know that they sin much and deserve only God's wrath and punishment, those who call out God and ask for forgiveness. But Paul doesn't say, "Sinner, look out, the judgment is coming. He doesn't say, "Sinner, try harder, and God might not get you.

Instead, he shows us God's love for us that we do not deserve. He shows us God's mercy that he has chosen us from eternity to be his own. He shows us the mercy of God that he has chosen to make us us own through his one and only Son.

Being a child of God, belonging to God's family, has great benefits. God sends the Holy Spirit to you to work faith in Jesus. Through this faith the Holy Spirit works, we are counted as God's child. Through Jesus, we are given forgiveness for our many sins. We also know that our place in God's family is not just here on earth it extends to heaven.

We belong to God's family of believers. He chose us before we were even born. This place where we belong, this family we belong to, is something special.

Sermonette 2: God Shows You Where you Belong

Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 10: 22-25

There is a well-known hymn in our hymnal, I'm But a Stranger Here, Heaven is My Home. This hymn is usually sung at funeral services for someone who has passed in faith and is with Jesus in heaven. There is a lot of truth in this hymn. We are not meant to be on earth forever. We are not here permanently. We are only here temporarily. God intends that we will pass from this earth on to something much better than the world we have lived in.

What the hymn doesn't address is where we belong while we are here on earth. Our final destination is heaven, but where do children of God belong here on earth?

We live in a world that is becoming more and more hostile to Christians. There was a time when you could ask off for church and not be afraid that you would suffer consequences from your job. There was a time that you which of your co-workers or neighbors are believers. That is becoming harder and harder to find these days. More often we find hostility towards Biblical values and morals. We find mocking and abuse when we show who we belong to.

Where can we find a place that that doesn't happen, where we belong? Here's a hint, it won't be in the safe places set up on college campuses, or at coffee shops, or the break room.

The Christian Jews in the first century were facing persecution that we cannot even imagine. They were being persecuted for a number of different reasons. First of all, the Christian religion was just about the only religion that the Roman government would not recognize. Because of the pressure from the Jewish religious leaders, the name Christian was very close to the word terrorist. Christians were blamed for all the problems of the world.

Christians Jews were also being persecuted by their families. These Christian Jews were no longer following the Laws of the Jews. They were no longer doing what their families had always done. Their families no longer supported them when they became Christians.

Finally, there was no peace for these Jewish Christians because even after they fled from Judah to find freedom. Rome allowed the Jewish leaders to send people out to find the Christians arrest them and even kill them.

Needless to say, it was hard for a Christian Jew to find a place of peace, where they could really belong. It was easier for them to hide in secret. But in the middle of all of this persecution, the writer to the Hebrews tells the people to gather together. He tells them to come to together with their Christian family so that they have a place to belong. **²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

Hiding seems safe when there is persecution. If we don't do the things that mark us as Christians and believers there will be no target on our back. If we do not stand against sinful things, if we do not raise our voice in opposition, if we do not attend the Lord's house we will be safer. Maybe if we go to a church which is Christian in name only then we can feel religious, but not actually have to worry about what the Bible says.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us, God gives you a place to belong and this is where you should be..... often. Be in God's House, surrounded by those who believe in the truths of the Bible as you do, confessing the truths of Jesus, and worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

God wants you in his house, he does not want us to give up meeting together when there is persecution or trial. He wants the opposite, he wants us to meet more often, to be in the Word more, especially you are tired and overworked, especially when you have the burdens of the world on your shoulders. You belong, in my God's house where you will be encouraged by the Word and by your fellow Christians.

We will never find out there, what God provides in here. We won't find the good news of forgiveness and salvation. We won't find Christian encouragement and guidance from our Christian family and from God's Word.

We may be strangers, temporary dwellers on this earth, but God does not want us to be strangers in his house. God has given us his house as a place of peace and safety and that is where we belong.

Sermonette 3: Not Only Do You Belong, You Are Needed.

Scripture Lesson: Ephesians 2:14, 18-21, 24-27

Part of a sense of belonging is feeling needed. We want more than to be part of the group, we want to be needed by the group.

This feeling can cause problems in church. It's so unfortunate, when people don't come to church often, who don't join anything, who don't come to any of the extra events, or who don't volunteer for anything, are the same people who feel like they don't belong. They don't feel needed by their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. What is worse, when we don't feel needed by the congregation, it is so easy for the devil to tempt us that we aren't actually needed and that there is nothing wrong with not being in the Lord's house.

Paul says quite the opposite. Whether we feel it or not, whether we notice it or not, whether we want to admit it or not, we belong to God's family and we are needed.

¹⁴ Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Not only do you belong..... you are needed!! Your gifts and talents, your offerings and time, your thoughts and prayers are needed by the family of believers.

When God called you to be his own, this wasn't a passive call. It is very active. Through the Holy Spirit you became one of God's children and then he gave you your job. Do everything in your power to make sure that people hear my Word and that people hear it.

All of God's people join together to do the same job: to spread the Gospel. While we have the same purpose, we may not all perform the same function to get this job done.

I like to watch videos of Rube Goldberg machines. These are the long chains of actions and reaction that must take place for the ball to keep rolling. The ball falls into a bucket that lands on a mousetrap that knocks over the pitches that fills the cup and so on.

What makes these amazing is that all it takes is one piece of the machine to be a little off and it all falls apart. To get all of the pieces working together so that the whole chain works takes a long time to complete.

The same is true for this body of believers performing the work that God has given us to do. We all work together in an amazing chain. But if only one person to not do their job, it will fall apart.

Are you a part of the body of believers? Are you looking for ways to use your gifts and talents to God's glory or, instead, are you waiting for someone else to do it.

You belong to the work of God at Summerlin Lutheran and the work that God has planned in this world and you are needed.

Jesus died to forgive you of your sins. Jesus died to take away all the excuses that the devil tries to place in our way that makes us think that we do not belong. Jesus died to give you new life in him. This new life is not a life that is lived lost in trying to find ourselves and a reason for living. This is a life where we know where we belong and who we belong to.

We know who we are. We belong to God. We have been purchased and won with the blood of Christ. We know where we should be. We belong in God's house to be built up in the Word. We know what we should do. We belong when and where we can use our gifts to thank God and to carry out his work.