

“You Belong”

Portions contributed by [James E. Parks](#).

Psalm 23:1-6

Acts 2:41-47

We continue our 40 day focus on community. Last week we talked about our calling to reach out to others together. We are called to be mindful of opportunities to reach out with the love of Christ. That is a purpose God has for us together.

The purpose we are focusing on today is fellowship. Many times fellowship brings pictures of coffee hour, hanging out, or just casual gatherings...right? That is not wrong, but fellowship could be so much more.

The picture of fellowship in the Scripture this morning shows, a church that is together, in everything. They worship together. They eat together. They serve together. This is what fellowship can be. Fellowship can mean that we are together in everything.

We know we are meant to go through this life with one another. We are better together, but we need to continue to be committed to each other.

Again, remember that we are not supposed to be alone in this life. We are not meant to be independent and out on our own. Now, I have only been in jail once. Okay, actually I was just there to visit a friend...and then that one time when we had some prison cell thing at our school...oh! There was that time that I was under house arrest. Well, it was my kids pretending to be police officers and arrested me for not sharing my chocolates.

But I have seen plenty of people in prison on TV or in movies to know what happens in prison when someone is being severely punished. They are sent to “the hole” right? Solitary confinement!

They are kept away from the other prisoners and often have minimal contact even with the prison staff.

This is not really a punishment that causes physical pain, but it is meant to cause emotional and psychological pain. They often show a person losing their connection to reality through this punishment. You see, this is the most severe punishment, to being taken out of fellowship, out of community.

That is evidence that we are not meant to live our lives alone. We need each other. We need to have fellowship with others in this life. My plan, for this morning, was to give you opportunities to fellowship, opportunities to be together...but???

You see, there is something special about being together, being with a group and knowing you belong. As we get together and get to know each other, that fellowship becomes closer and more personal. And, there are different levels of closeness we have with different people.

There are strangers, people you don't yet know. There are people that you have heard their name before, but maybe never met. There are acquaintances that are people you have met a few times, and you recognize them. Maybe next you have coworkers or those you have a professional relationship with. Then there is your friends, and finally family. I would think that family are those you are most closest to, but maybe not.

As I thought about these levels of closeness, I was reminded of something a friend told me about. They were reading a book called, "Refrigerator Rights". Do you know what refrigerator rights are?

Apparently, according to my friend, it's when a person who comes into your house, your home, and they know they can go to the refrigerator and grab something to drink or eat. Think about it. How many people do you let into your refrigerator?

I am not sure if the refrigerator rights mean they don't even have to ask, because most people will at least ask, "...can I grab something to drink."; however, most of the time we go into the fridge and get it for them. Only someone who belongs to your group will be allowed into your fridge.

I remember one time, when I was at a friend of a friend's house, and he told me that if I wanted something to drink, I could just grab it from the fridge. Well, I just kind of sat there. I was not sure I really wanted to get into his fridge. Not because I expected bad things to be in there or anything, it just seemed to be kind of a big step to go into his fridge the first time I was at his house.

But, I eventually got used to it, and after the third time or so, I knew I could go there to get something to drink. Now, it is a separate fridge, for drinks and not their family fridge, so maybe that is on another level all together.

So, take a few minutes today, and think of who would be in your group of refrigerator rights. Do you give those rights to anyone? Why or why not? And if you do, who is on that list?

Another place to notice our closeness to others, is looking at our home. It used to be important to have a front porch to get out and see everyone. Now we like our back patios. It is enclosed to give us privacy. I was also reading about how the automatic garage door opener changed things.

We used to have to get out of the car to put up the door. Now you can stay in your car, pull into the garage and many garages are connected to our homes, so we can get in without having to even talk with any of our neighbors.

God has created us for community and we must be mindful of building our relationships with one another. We build our relationships by being together. And when we come together we will notice differences.

We are not all the same, right? And God does not want, or expect us to all be the same. God loves variety and diversity. This is part of the symbolism of many of our banners around the sanctuary. The different colors and patterns represent our differences and yet the colors and patterns complement each other. They go together.

One thing I have been trying to do, is to fellowship with believers that are different. So, I started attending Saturday afternoon mass at St. Bart's Catholic Church, when I find a free Saturday afternoon. I started doing that, because in some of our pastor groups we discussed ways to worship ourselves, and Father Steve invited us.

So, during these 40 days I want to start attending Saturday mass more often. And the time when I was able to make it, it has been a good experience. I appreciate having that time of worship, but I also am getting to know some of our brothers and sisters at the Catholic Church.

I also have desired to get to know people from other church's, which can be tough for me because I want other churches to know we are not trying to get their members, but I want to build a relationship, so we can learn to work together for God's work. One project I hope to work on in the future is what I spoke about last year in our combined church gathering at Brooks Park last July.

That is to form a committee of people from all of the churches in our area, in hopes to find ways we can work together in sharing Christ's love to our community.

I think this could be a good project for us to work on in this coming year, as we look at ways for our church to help our community in seeing the love that Christ has for us all. If we are in fellowship with other believers we will be able to work together better to serve God and our community.

Our scripture memory verse for this week calls us into fellowship in a powerful way. It is Romans 12:5, and it says, **“So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”**
Romans 12:5.

We belong to each other. And this is more than just fitting together, but you belong to me and I belong to you. Now if you belong to me I better take care of you. When our car needs some repairs, which is not fun for the pocketbook, we try to take care of our vehicles, so they will continue to run and we can depend on them.

We are also looking to replace, or add, some ceiling fans in the parsonage. Again, it needs to be replaced or added, and I want to take care of my home in which my family and I live. I think I take pretty good care of my stuff. Of course, I also recognize...it just stuff.

I think of my kids and how they belong to me. I do everything I can for them. Many of the things I do in life is because I want to do what is best for my kids. Well, God says, that is how we are to treat other Christians. We belong to each other.

Now, that means we do more than tolerate each other...that means we do more than smile and wave to each other. We need to fellowship with each other. We need to spend time together. We need to work through issues and tensions together. We need to forgive each other. We belong to each other.

But more than that, as I try to treat things that belong to me with respect, if I have someone else's belongings I try to treat it a little bit better than that. Are you with me?

I mean in my car I will leave an empty pop can or a receipt on the floor. In someone else's car I would not do that. I pick up after myself. If my kids spill a drink on my carpet, I don't like it, but I know it is our mess and we will clean it as best we can.

If my kids spill a drink on someone else's carpet...I'm diving on that thing, as I am apologizing while trying to get it up as fast as I can, and offering to re-carpet the whole house if necessary. Maybe not that far, but I feel horrible if I mistreat someone else's belongings.

I hope we can remember that we belong to each other, but each of you first belonged to God. You are God's people. We especially remember this as whenever we celebrate a baptism. For, in baptism we recognize that God calls us by name and we are his children.

Remember...you are a child of God. And we need to fellowship together as children who belong to God. Spend time together, take care of one another, because...because you belong to God, and you also belong to each other.

Prayer:

God, our guide, thank you for caring for all of our needs. Help us to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness as we receive your blessings and continue to strive towards your goal of helping and being together with others. **Amen!!!**