

Sunday, September 15, 2019

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Psalms 139 861 VU

Luke 15:1-10

### Belong: Finding Jesus

For many years on Sesame Street, Ernie would introduce a game for the viewers which showed 4 items on the tv screen. The children watching the program were to decide which one item did not belong based upon the group to which the other 3 items belonged. This was an important teaching to preschoolers to point out differences. Yet has this set up some of the tensions and problems still existing today when we think about the 'isms' and problems in our society based upon differences. Maybe Ernie should have focused on how or what the items had in common?

As we begin the early fall series entitled "Be- a part of Christ's Church" our focus today is on what it means to belong. How do you know when you belong that is, when you become a part of some group or organization or are recognized and welcomed into whatever you might do. Music today reflects relationships between people as one belonging to another through love and commitment. Today we sang a beloved and familiar hymn, "Jesus Loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so; little ones to Him belong, in his love we shall be strong." (365 VU) But if you look at these words closely—little ones to him belong... what about the big ones—adults? We belong to Jesus as well and there is comfort and hope and peace in all of this! But what does this mean to belong to Jesus and to His church?

To understand this we must understand that Jesus is God's Son- a child born of woman who came and lived as a human being. Yet when it was the right time, Jesus preached, taught and healed people. Because of his teachings challenging the established leadership and with his authority to do so as the Son of Man, Jesus was crucified. But because Jesus is God's Son, he rose from death. And if we believe in him—we belong to him because of God and through God's presence here and now.

Psalms 139 describes the relationship God has with his people—all of His people as individuals. When we sit, rise, what we think, where we go, where we rest; even what we are going to say. God protects and looks after us. And there is no place where God is not present. God made us—fearfully and wonderfully made us and knew what we would be like before we were born. As Jeremiah wrote – we are the clay in God's hands. He is the Potter and as clay spins on the wheel different things are formed, spoiled and reformed. So too are we formed, spoiled and reformed. God's thoughts for us are precious and more numerous than the grains of sand! And God places these thoughts and causes us to think for

ourselves as we seek him. Yet at the same time God searches our hearts and knows us more than we know ourselves. Everyone belongs to God—there are no differences. It is us who see the differences and make them matter. We belong to God. Just like a child belongs to a parent, the relationship is very strong and the bond is only broken when one walks away. But we know that in this relationship with God—God will not leave us, it is we who turn from him in order to find our own path. But because we are His, he receives us back again and again. We belong to God yet we also need to know how we might relate to Jesus for we are also His through love.

Jesus was teaching the disciples along with the crowd including tax collectors and other known sinners. Pharisees and the scribes, who were a part of the established faith tradition were also listening to Jesus as he was teaching. Using parables stories which the listeners could relate to Jesus' talked about sheep. Many of those listening would have been farmers or hired hand or shepherds to the farmers. Jesus says, "Suppose you have 100 sheep and you lost one what do you do? You leave the 99 in the wilderness and go looking for the one who has gone astray. You search for the one who is lost until it is found. And when it is found you pick it up and carry it on your shoulders all the way back home. When you get home you call all your friends and neighbours together inviting them to "rejoice with you because you found the sheep that was lost." Then Jesus says, I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance.

In the story, all 100 sheep belong to the farmer or the owner of the sheep. It is the shepherd's responsibility to look after them all as they graze in the pasture looking for good grass and clean water. Yet when it is time to go home for the night this shepherd counts his sheep and realizes that there is one missing. Keeping the 99 safe in the sheep's fold, the shepherd goes and searches for the missing sheep. We don't know if the missing sheep is young, old, male, female, healthy or not healthy but it does not matter. All we do know is that the sheep belongs to the shepherd and it is his responsibility to look after them all. Leaving the 99 safe, the shepherd begins to search for the sheep. We don't know where the sheep was or why it didn't come home when called, only that it was separated from the rest. It might have been caught in a bush, chased by a predator or even just wanted better grass to eat. Whatever the circumstance, the sheep has wandered away from the rest and is alone, scared and not sure of what will happen. Yet the shepherd is searching for it as it is important to him the one put in charge of the care of all the sheep and it belongs with the rest. So he searches, and watches and when he finds it—he runs up to up, checks to see it if is hurt and whether it is or not, he picks it up and puts it across his shoulders

and carries it home. He then is so happy he has to tell others. So he tells his friends and they are happy for him too!

But it is what Jesus says after he tells the story which is important: “so it is that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.” What is he saying to his listeners? Is this when he says something that those hearing him take offense? Who are the 99 righteous in this story? Who is the lost sheep or sinner? Is Jesus stating something offensive about who belongs in heaven and who does not? Or is he merely pointing out that repentance brings joy like when a lost sheep is found? Don’t all 100 sheep belong to the shepherd? Why is the lost one now honoured in a different way?

As we consider this parable just who is lost/found? Who belongs to who and what does it mean to rejoice when one repents? As we strive to understand what it means to belong to Jesus we might be the sheep hoping that the shepherd will find us. Or we might even be the shepherd searching because we yearn to be filled with joy after the sheep is found. It all depends upon where you are right now.

What does it mean to find Jesus when in reality God has always been with us all the time? As we read, God is the creator but it is Jesus who searches for you and rejoices when you come back to God through Him. Maybe this is where you are right now. You feel or know that you belong to God—because God created you yet your relationship with Jesus is a little fuzzy. You are searching for Jesus and are unsure of where to look to experience his open arms of forgiveness and love. But what we have to remember is that while we are looking for Him. Jesus is really searching for us and wanting you to come back to him. You belong to Jesus and if you speak with God through Jesus what lead you away from him no matter what it is, you are forgiven and there will be much rejoicing in heaven today!

As a church family we welcome and rejoice with you as you are on a journey to find Jesus in new ways. Just as we experience God’s Spirit moving amongst us and inviting us to know again in our hearts that we are His this morning. What we have in common is far more than any differences that the world outside the walls state or are perceived. What we have in common is our relationship with Jesus who died and rose again for each of us. We are a forgiven people. We believe in God, we belong to God and we know that we will sin again yet as we seek to grow closer to God our Creator, Jesus calls us to follow so that we might grow in our faith and understanding of God, Father, Son and spirit.

What does it mean to belong to God? God is with us when we are afraid, celebrating and even when we are searching for peace with others. Mother Teresa wrote, “If we have no peace it is because

we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” We belong to God and to know Jesus is to share in the love we have for each other as a family in faith. How do we grow in our knowledge and faith is in trusting others who have gone before to lead us to Jesus. For He alone will change us if we have faith and believe.

Let us reflect on these ideas as we share together: “WE Believe in God” by Amy Grant

We believe in God, and we all need Jesus  
'cause life is hard and it might not get easier  
But don't be afraid to know who you are  
Don't be afraid to show it.

If you believe in God, if you say you need Jesus  
He'll be where you are and He never will leave you.  
Sing to me now words that are true so all in this place can know it.

We believe in God and we all need Jesus  
We believe in God and we all need Jesus  
We believe in God and we all need Jesus.  
Sing to me now words that are true  
So all in this place can know it. (Jesus)