

35 The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. **36** When he saw Jesus walking along he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" **37** The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus. **38** When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, "What are you looking for?" They said, "Rabbi (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?" **39** He replied, "Come and see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.
John 1:35-39

We are spiritual beings. We know this. Our culture recognizes this. But what it doesn't know is that spirituality is by definition communal. There is no spirituality apart from community. When we are cut off from community, we wither inside. This is why the gift of belonging is one of God's greatest gifts to us. Our journey to the place where we belong begins and ends in community, the common unity that teaches us who we are.

"And yet it moves!" : Belonging to the Kin-dom of God

1/26/19

17 From that time Jesus began to announce, "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" (*Matthew 4:12-17*)

16 I'm not ashamed of the gospel: it is God's own power for salvation to all who have faith in God.

(*Romans 1:16a*)

The good news Jesus preached is short and clear: the kin-dom of God is happening now! This kin-dom is the new community God creates by accepting God's rightful place at the center of human life. Jesus is making this kin-dom happen now. **Right relationship** with one another is powered by right relationship with God - and vice versa. This dynamite truth is the gospel that makes us whole.

"People are hard to hate close up. Move in." : Belonging and the Body of Christ

2/2/19

12 So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. **2** Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature. **3** Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you. **4** We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. **5** In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. (*Romans 12:1-5*)

What does it mean to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ? What does belonging to the Church have to do with salvation, with that wholeness our good news promises? This is belonging at its most nitty-gritty. This is the place where we embrace the cost of following Jesus.

"Speak truth to BS. Be Civil" : Belonging and Truth

2/9/19

12 His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ **13** until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ **14** As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. **15** Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-15)

We belong to God. We belong to ourselves. We belong to one another in Christ. Healthy belonging demands speaking truth as much as it demands considerate speech. The practice of speaking truth in love is the most powerful and effective way to become the new human community God intends.

"Hold hands. With strangers." : Belonging and Hospitality

2/16/19

13 Keep loving each other like family. 2 Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. 3 Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place. (Hebrews 13:1-3, CEB)

Loneliness, feeling disconnected, feeling like we're on the outside looking in: we've all been there. Now it seems the whole world is there. The more people sort themselves into like-minded groups, the less belonging there actually is. We are all connected in a way that can never be broken, but *our belief in that connection* is being tested and actively obscured by powers that want to exploit and use us. We overcome those powers through the power of genuine hospitality.

"Strong back. Soft front." : Belonging, Courage, and Vulnerability

2/23/19

28 One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" 29 Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.[d] 31 The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself.[e] No other commandment is greater than these." 32 The legal expert said to him, "Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, "You aren't far from God's kingdom." (Mark 12:28-34)

We all want to belong. But are we willing to pay the price? Some think fitting in and seeking approval is what's required, but those actually get in the way of true belonging. "**True belonging** only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world." This means "our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance." The price of true belonging is to genuinely love and accept yourself. (Brenè Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*)