

CHRIST OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Right Where You Belong

John 14:15-23

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Where do you belong? On a nice Spring evening/morning like this, you might be thinking, “I belong on the golf course or in the boat or lounging on my deck!” I’m thankful that you realize that even on “Pure Michigan” mornings you belong in church!

But I guess what I am really asking is where do you feel like you belong? Is it at work where you are the one everyone looks to you for the answers? Is it at home when your pajamaed three-year-old snuggles into your lap for a book before bed? Is it laughing with old friends? Is it arm in arm with your wife of these many years? This kind of belonging really has to do with being needed or loved or accepted. When God’s blessed us to find such things in this life, we usually feel as if we’re right where we belong.

The disciples apparently felt that way about being with Jesus. They had, after all, left everything to be with him. He was warm and winsome and full of life, a human magnet the likes of which they had never experienced before and would never know again. To be with him was to know the strongest and truest sense of belonging there could be. He was their fortress of sanity in a crazy culture; their fount of wisdom in a foolish and wicked world. And they knew Jesus loved them, accepted them. He even made them feel needed. Despite so many others having given up on him, and despite what he had been telling them was about to happen to him and to them, with him was where they most wanted to be, because it was where they felt they truly belonged.

But here in today’s Holy Gospel they are now in the Upper Room, just mere hours before Jesus’ crucifixion. They’re engaged in serious discussion with him about how he would soon be going away. It was a hard conversation for them to have. It made them afraid of losing their connection to him. And so, Jesus assured them: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live” (Jn 14:18). But judging from their reactions, as typified by the other Judas’ question, it doesn’t seem as if it did much good at the time.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that I think everyone belongs in church at least every single week. And that’s not just because it’s my job or because of some “more the merrier” theology. It’s because God’s Word says in Romans 10:17, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” To put it in terms of belonging, church is where we connect with Jesus. Here he invites us to share his Supper. Here he washes us with the waters of his Baptism and teaches us how to pray. This is where he tells us he loves us, understands us, and forgives us. Jesus is our fortress of sanity in a crazy culture too. Our fount of wisdom in a foolish and wicked world. Furthermore, at church we’re among Christ’s people, our brothers and sisters in the faith, who just like us aren’t perfect but are at least trying to draw on their connection to Jesus in establishing and maintaining their connection with you. Church really is – more than anywhere else - where we truly belong.

But unless you are as blessed as I am to work here, you can’t come to church every day. You can’t just be with brothers and sisters in the faith 24/7. Instead, you often must go to places seemingly well beyond the reach of the cord of your connection to Christ. Sometimes you must have difficult conversations with people who aren’t even

pretending to try to be anything like Jesus. How can you ever hope to feel like you belong in such situations and circumstances? How can you keep that closeness to your Savior?

The disciples were wondering pretty much the same thing that night Jesus told them he'd soon be leaving. Certainly, it would be something they'd have to figure out how to deal with when their risen Jesus ascended into heaven. And even more so as they later fanned out to take the Gospel out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria and unto the ends of the earth. How could they keep the love and acceptance and belonging they enjoyed with Jesus then?

Well, like Jesus said, he was not going to leave them orphaned. If he loved them enough to die for their sins, he loved them enough to provide a way for them to stay connected to him no matter where they were. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (Jn 14:16-18). Jesus was their first advocate; the Holy Spirit would be another one. One who would be with them forever, helping them and guiding them with God's Word and through it keeping them connected to Jesus and each other even after he was gone away from them into heaven ... even after they went their separate ways.

Through this connection, the Holy Spirit would empower the Apostles to keep Jesus' commands out of love for Jesus. And just listen to what Jesus promised would happen then: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (Jn 14:23). In other words, they would always be right where they belonged whenever and wherever they were doing what Jesus had told them to do. And they would know it, appreciate it, and rejoice because of it.

If God has called you to be, say a Christian parent, there are many times when you won't feel adequate to the task ... when circumstances will challenge the connection Christ has established with you and your children. The ever-present temptation is to compromise, to in effect give up on something Jesus said in order to give into something your children want or you want for your children. No mom, no dad likes to be the one who says "No." But sometimes on account of our connection to Jesus he needs us to say exactly that.

If God's called you to be a Christian parent, child, spouse, employee, supervisor, neighbor, citizen, friend then that's where that's where you belong. No matter how difficult it might presently be. Christ has not been raised from the dead in triumph over sin, death, and the devil just to abandon us to fend for ourselves in the vocations he's given us in this life. Rather, by means of Word and Sacrament he gives you the Holy Spirit so that out of love for him we want to obey his teaching in the roles he's given us. For the life we were meant to live is not where we don't belong – like in the arms of another or in reliving our childhoods through our children or in any number of areas Christians have no call from God to visit. Instead it's lived whenever and wherever we are doing what Jesus has told us to do.

And that's exactly what we need to hear. For this whole issue of belonging is a daily challenge for us. Ask the parent who while putting in long hours feels he or she belongs at home, and while at home spending time with the family feels they really need to give their attention to something at work. Where do you belong when your various God-given vocations are pulling you in multiple directions at once? Or what about the teen who doesn't seem to fit in. None of the crowds at school seem to have a place for her. What does she do when she doesn't feel like she belongs anywhere? Or the individual who after decades of working has now lost his job. You try to get up in the morning like you always did and make a job out of finding a job, but when all you get is voicemail and automated replies to the countless online applications you've submitted, you don't feel all that needed. Or the person who sits home alone virtually every night. The loneliness makes it hard to feel loved, even by Jesus.

But what did Jesus tell his disciples that night? "Because I live, you also will live" (14:19). Live eternally in glory with him, yes. But also live the life where he's called you to live right now, one that consists of Spirit-enabled obedience to his teaching. Then even if you are being pulled in multiple directions at once, you'll be right where you belong: with God the Father and his Son making their home with you.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- P:** O God, from whom all good things come: Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to think those things which are right, and by your goodness help us to do them; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C:** [sung] **Amen.**

Prayers of the Church

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