

“We Belong to God and Each Other”

Psalm 139:13-16a, John 4:16b-21, Genesis 3:7b-13, Genesis 4:9, Matthew 5:21-24, Acts 2:42-47

Pastor James York

September 15, 2013

Prayer for Understanding God our Teacher, inspire us with your Holy Spirit. Help us to read your Word with understanding and having read it, may we never be the same. Silence in us any voice but your own. Strengthen our ties to each other and to you. Deepen our commitment and help us hear your call. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

You belong to God. You are created in the very image of God. Of all the beauty of the cosmos, you are God's greatest delight. God loves you. God does everything it takes to keep welcoming you back into God's family.

The psalmist sings of God's love and care for us. God knows everything about you; yet, God still loves you. Wherever you go, even if you try to hide from God, still God is there. God is always with you offering forgiving and healing grace. Next the psalmist sings. **Psalm 139:13-16a NRSV “For it was you, God, who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.”**

You are wonderful made. You are God's masterpiece. You have infinite worth, because you belong to God. God smiled upon you and declared that you belong to God before you were even born. Worship is giving all praise, honor, and glory to God. Worship is a journey of transformation. We experience God. We make a connection with God enabling us to receive hope, peace, grace, joy, and love. We become grateful to God. Our gratitude inspires us to be generous, to share, to serve. Somewhere on this resurrection journey one discovers abundant life. Worship is celebrating that we belong to God. Worship also celebrates that we belong to each other. Worship is loving God and loving all people. Scripture proclaims. **1 John 4:16b-21 NRSV “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in**

this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as God is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

We belong to God and each other. We should all be connected. Worship gives honor and worth to God. According to John we can only worship God if we are giving honor and worth to each other, to everyone. We cannot fully worship God without giving honor and worth to our enemies. God’s love for us, our belonging to God, God’s healing forgiveness, resurrection eternal life is all a given, a free gift. Living into the joy, the abundant life of these truths is really hard, because you and I cannot experience the joy of belonging to God until we belong to each other.

The tragedy of the fall is our relationships with each other become broken with blame, shame, and fear. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, Genesis explains. **Genesis 3:7b-13 NRSV “They knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.””** They were ashamed and afraid. Instead of taking responsibility for their actions immediately they blamed each other. You cannot fully worship God if you blame another. What can we do to connect to each other? How can we stop disconnection and discord? How can we stop judging and blaming each other: a person from a different political party, generation, race,

religion? How can we stop judging and blaming people who perceive things very differently than ourselves?

One chapter later in Genesis we have two brothers with entirely different world views. One is a vegetable farmer, the other a shepherd. One an introvert, the other an extrovert. One a vegetarian, the other a meat eater. These brothers failed to belong to each other. Instead, Cain became so jealous of Abel that he wrongly felt God loved his brother and his worship more. Cain's jealousy escalated to blame, then hate, then murder. Genesis then states. **Genesis 4:9 NRSV "Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"**" Cain knew the correct answer. Yes, each of us is indeed our brother's keeper. We all belong to each other. The well-being of everyone is our responsibility. We cannot fully worship until everyone has meaningful employment, food, a home, and health care. We cannot fully worship until everyone is cared for and loved. It is a hard, radical message. It is the main reason Jesus was crucified.

Jesus said. **Matthew 5:21-24 NLT "You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. "So if you are presenting a offering at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God."** Before coming to worship, you and I are to be reconciled with everyone. In order to fully worship God, to give honor and worth to God, each of us needs to give honor and worth to those with whom we disagree.

Luke explains how the early church strived to worship God by belonging to, caring for, and loving each other. **Acts 2:42-47 The Message "They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in**

general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.”

Worship of God is characterized by an overwhelming gratitude for the abundance and wonder of God’s good gifts and an overflowing generosity which seeks to share with all humanity the joy, compassion, and righteousness of abundant life with God.

Both of the sacraments reveal our belonging to God and each other. We gather around the Lord’s Table where everyone has a place personally prepared for them by Jesus. Each person is served a meal by Jesus supplying all their true needs. We gather around one really huge Lord’s Table where everyone is equal, everyone is loved.

In the waters of baptism we celebrate that we belong to God and each other. A part of every baptism, around the world, in any denomination, is a promise to care for the baptized. If you are a Christian, even if you are not at a baptism, those who are there make a promise on your behalf committing that you will love, care and give worth to everyone who is baptized. If someone who is baptized shows up at our church with nothing, we are bound by the covenant of baptism, our promise to care for and provide for them. Radical baptism for all of us to fully worship all the baptized must have all their essential needs meant.

Anywhere there is fear we are to be there calming their fears. Anywhere there is shame we are to be there giving them worth. Anywhere there is hate we are to be there fostering reconciliation. Anywhere there is need we are to be there generously, joyously sharing all we have. Anywhere there is blame we are to be there. Martin Luther King said, “An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” We are our sisters and our brothers keepers.

God has wonderfully made us all equal. Jesus has redeemed us all regardless of politics, race, citizenship, status, assets, education, abilities, productivity, sinfulness. We are all equal. Anytime some have abundance and others scarcity we are disagreeing with God that all have equal worth. Anytime anyone is judged, excluded, ignored, or not noticed we are disagreeing with God and will not be able to fully worship. This is a radical message impossible to fully live, that is why God keeps transforming us with grace, however it is the lifestyle that we are to strive to live.

At Synod School, Professor of Worship, Claudio Carvalhaes spoke for five hours explaining what it means for us to belong to God and each other. He shared

how his mother would not let him leave the house until he read scripture, said a prayer and said. "I am wonderfully made by God." His mom encouraged him to be in awe all day of all the blessings God put in his life and to love everyone. He had an ah-ha moment when he was invited to be a guest teacher at a church who was looking for a pastor. Claudio was a talented pastor and looking for a call. He was shocked that he did not receive an invitation to be their pastor, so he inquired as to why. They explained that they were very poor and could not afford such a well-educated and talented pastor as himself. Claudio's heart was broken. After weeks of prayer and conversations with them, he went and served them as their pastor often without any pay; yet, everyone there always had their needs met. They shared their food, their clothes, their homes. They were trying to raise funds to fix up the building; yet, every time they accumulated a substantial amount of money someone in their community would have a need, so they gave the money to them. Claudio shared that it was there that he really discovered what it means to belong to God and each other. Claudio is now a well-paid professor. He is advocating that all pastors and professors receive the same pay, for everyone is of equal worth.

We are to love all people, to help each person find their voice which is worshipping God. A few years ago a young lady worked extremely hard rehearsing over and over again the National Anthem. Despite her talent and preparation she forgot the words as she was singing in front of a national audience for the NBA playoffs. She was embarrassed. Things could have gotten ugly fast.

The coach came over put his arm around the singer and prompted her with the lyrics. Her singing was faint and hesitate. The coach held the mic close to her and gestured for her to sing out. With his loving encouragement her voice got stronger. The lyrics came back and she sang out a beautiful anthem that lifted the spirits of the entire crowd.

We belong to God and each other. Whenever we give worth to another we are worshipping God.

Everyday remind yourself: I am wonderfully made. I belong to God. I am surrounded, sustained and I am being transformed by God's love. I belong to everyone. Strive to love, care, and give worth to everyone so you can discover the love, joy, and peace of fully worshipping God. Amen