



“On Belonging”

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Sermons at Central Park United Methodist Church

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To live in this world is often a difficult thing, especially for people of faith. Our world is as complex as it is perplexing a good deal of the time; you’ve got to stand fast in the face of confusion and fear, tethered firmly to the Word of God. Old-fashioned character attributes like honor and integrity, humility, ethical behavior, standing up for what’s right; keeping one’s word: these qualities are becoming increasingly rare, yet they remain the hallmark of Christian conduct. (I’m sure your mother taught you all these things, once-upon-a-time.)

You see, we belong to God and to one another; our Lord has told us so. And as children of God, so dearly loved and amply blessed, we are obliged to walk in righteous paths, just as He walked.

We are called to love and to forgive, just as He loved and continues to forgive. And though we know we are unworthy and abide under the warm cloak of God's grace, we do not willingly sin, nor should we justify the sins of others because we agree with their politics, or admire their lifestyles, or secretly want what they have. No, we look to the Christ and His kingdom in all things; testing everything, and holding fast to what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21) This is how we are to be, as Christians in the world: on our knees, towels in hand; washing the feet of one another. *"I give you a new commandment," Jesus said, "that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35) This is what the Gospel teaches us. This is fundamental to our cause.

Jesus' words in John 17 are located in what has come to be known as His "Farewell Discourse." In preparing to meet his death, Jesus prays to God the Father on behalf of us all. When read in context with the timeline of events leading up to His crucifixion, the words are profoundly moving.

Even as Jesus faced the horrifying specter of His own imminent suffering, He prayed for our protection. He claimed our lives as His own, and drew us entirely into the blessed circle of Redeeming Love. We belong to Him. *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15:13) What wondrous love is this, O my soul! It is a Love that knows no bounds. It is a debt we cannot repay; asking only that we live as His children, serving

and loving; sharing and forgiving. *“Thy Kingdom. Thy will be done.”* Living every hour of every day as if we know what these words mean. Little children, do not belong to the world, but be sanctified in the Truth that is Jesus the Christ.

Belong to one another, just as you belong to Him. For in loving and caring for one another you are loving and caring for Him. *“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”* (Matthew 25:35-36) Such acts of servanthood may not comport with what the world deems necessary, but we do not belong to the world. We belong to Christ. Go forth to serve, in His blessed name. Amen.