

2013-08-25 am2 trevor- **hudson discovering. belonging**

Good morning, friends, it's good to be with you. As most of you know, we are in a four week series looking at the church, what it means. Today our theme is the theme of belonging, and next week I'll do that one again, and we'll explore the theme of acceptance. You have a leaflet just inside the bulletin with our reading for today. I really do invite you to take it out today, particularly because today is a little bit of a Bible study that we're going to do together around these words that John writes in his first letter to the early church. So I'm going to read it to you now, and then we'll take a few moments to explore it together.

John writes these words: that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and which our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life. He is speaking here about the Lord, Jesus Christ, whom he has seen, whom he has heard, whom he has touched. This life appeared, and we have seen is, and we testify to it. And we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we've seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship, fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and we write this to make our joy complete.

This is the message that we heard from Christ and which we declare to you. God is light and in God there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with God and yet we walk in the darkness we lie and we do not live by the truth. But, this is a very big sentence, but if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship. We have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. We thank God so much for those words that come to us in scripture this morning and we pray that God will help us to understand them in terms of our own lives today.

One of the great privileges of being a pastor is the very special opportunity that I get to enter into the lives of other human beings. And when I look back over the last 30 odd years or so, and I've had the privilege of working in the Transkei, downtown Johannesburg, for four years, and for the past 30 odd years or so, on the East Rand. As I look back over all these years and all the people encounters that I've had I think the most important thing that I've come to learn, and I want to share this with you and just check it out with you, one of the most important things that I've learned is that deep down in the human heart, there is a very deep yearning to belong.

I think we see that yearning in the life of a child. As soon as a child enters this world we see in a child's life this yearning to connect, to belong, for intimacy. I want to suggest that that deep longing remains always in your heart and my heart. And we

shouldn't be surprised by that because we've been created by a God who is into relationships in a big way. God God-self, you know this, is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From all eternity the Father has been loving the Son, the Son has been loving the Father. The Holy Spirit has been holding Father and Son together in a deep, deep oneness, three in one, one in three.

We worship a relational God, and we are made in the image of a relational God, and so we are wired for connection. We are wired to belong. We are wired for relationship, and I think that is why, I think that is why our deepest heartache and our deepest heartbreaks come when our sense of belonging is fractured. When someone betrays us there is heartache and heartbreak. When someone walks away from us and a relationship is broken there is heartache and heartbreak. When we are excluded, when someone says to us, perhaps a group, or even a church, you are not welcome here, you are not wanted here, there is heartache and heartbreak.

When we are rejected for whatever reason, where we are told that we are not wanted, there is heartache and heartbreak. Do you remember those days on the school grounds when they would play games and they'd pick teams, and they weren't picking you, and you would wait and wait and wait until someone picked you on their side? I have a number of friends, and a number of you are here today, from AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the one thing I've learned from recovering alcoholics, and I hear this again and again, recovering alcoholics just say to me, you know, Trevor, you know the reason I drank so heavily? It gave me a sense of belonging, even if it was a false belonging. It just helped me to know I belonged. When I drank I knew I belonged.

Now, it's against this backdrop today that I want to speak about belonging. And I'm going to take you through those words that we read earlier, and that's why I trust that that leaflet is near you and you can look at it now and then and see where I'm coming from. But I just want to take you through that this morning, and as I do that I'm praying that somehow God will speak to you as God has spoken to me in preparation for this moment.

I want you to notice first of all, and you're going to find this surprising, what the purpose of the Christian gospel is. I wonder how you would answer that if I were to come to you and if I were to say to you, what is the purpose of Christianity? What is the purpose of the Christian gospel? Why do we preach and teach every Sunday? Why do we do it? What is the purpose? Now, look at how John answers that question. The verse will come up on the screen, and I want you to look at it very carefully. We proclaim to you what we've seen and heard. We proclaim to you Jesus Christ.

That's what we've seen. That's what we've heard. That's what our hands have touched. We proclaim to you what we've seen and heard, now, look at what the purpose is, so that you also may have fellowship. That's the purpose of the gospel. Now, I don't know about you, but when I first read that I was disappointed. Fellowship has become a very pap word. It's got no strength. It's a weak word today. What do you think of when I say fellowship? You think of church teas in church halls, shaking hands at church doors, being all polite with each other, fellowship. It's not a very attractive word today.

Did Jesus come and live and die and rise and descend and pour out His spirit so we could drink tea together? Did He? No. The meaning of fellowship is much deeper. Come; let's go a little bit deeper. Fellowship is a Greek word: *koinonia*. It's a robust word, a rich word, full of meaning. Fellowship is to share life with each other. Fellowship is to belong deeply. Jesus has come into this world to make available to each one of us an experience of deep and real belonging, a sharing of life. He comes to us in our little individualistic, isolated worlds. He comes to us with all our heartaches and heartbreaks, and He comes to us and He says, I want to make available to you an experience of belonging, of real belonging.

Now, I want you to notice secondly, we're going to go back to the text, it's going to come up soon, notice that this belonging has got two dimensions. And we need to get these two dimensions very clear in our mind. We proclaim to you what we've seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. Stop there. Fellowship with us, that's horizontal. That's with each other. Jesus comes that we might experience a deep sense of belonging with each other. This is the first dimension.

Now, look at the other dimension. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. That's the vertical dimension. Horizontal and vertical together makes the sign of a cross. What God has put together, let no person ever put asunder. Jesus comes to draw us into a deep belonging with each other, and with the Father, and with the Son. Let's start with the each other dimension.. When Jesus enters my life, if Jesus enters your life, when you open your life to Christ He never comes alone. He's always got His arms around His family and He brings His family with Him into our life.

And they are always different to us, always. Some are rich, some are poor, some are black, some are white, some shout for Kings, others shout for Lions. He brings them all. And I can't say to Jesus, Jesus, I want You, but could you please stick your family, especially Mrs So and So who should go join the Methodists in Benoni! You can't do that. Jesus brings a family into our life with Him, and the one thing I want to say about this family, who are so different to us, is that they are a bunch of recovering sinners. They haven't got it all together yet. They're not perfect.

Often I meet people who are looking for the perfect church. And they go from church to church to church looking for a perfect church, and I always say to them, don't join it, because if you join it you're going to spoil it. You're going to spoil it. I've just come back from PE, which you know is the best city in South Africa, and I've just had three days of work down there, and the one thing I noticed again, it always hits me when I go to Port Elizabeth, are the busses. There are still lots of busses on the road, and you still get around from suburb to suburb to suburb with these double-decker busses. You don't often see them around here.

And my mind went back. My son was nine years of age, eight, nine years of age, many years ago, and I remember taking him down to PE. We went down, and I took him for a bus ride. I just wanted him to experience how I grew up, on busses. I just lived on busses. And I will never forget, we were going down Cape Road, the main street in Port Elizabeth, and we were sitting together. There was a guy in front of us

who had a terrible sniff, terrible sniff. I'm not going to demonstrate, but it was, like, from bottom up. It was just terrible.

So as we sat on the bus with this guy sniffing Mark said to me, dad, can we ask this guy just to get off the bus? I said to him, son, I can't do that, because if we're going to be on the bus we are stuck with this guy. And that's always been a parable for me. Does that make sense, that Jesus, when He comes into our life He brings people, and they sniff? They sniff! That's the Kingdom bus, that's the community bus that Jesus brings into our life, and when we get onto that bus we are surrounded by sniffers. Now, let me say something else. You sniff as well. I sniff as well. This is the family that we become part of. We become part of a family that are not perfect, not flawless. We are all on a journey of recovery. We are all a little bit of a mess. And this is the family that Jesus calls us to belong with.

And that's the one dimension. That's horizontal, but there's also a vertical dimension. Jesus comes in and He invites us into a deep belonging with the Father and with the Son, with the Trinity. We are made for this connection with the Trinity. Jesus brings us into a deep belonging with one another and with God, and that's what we are made for, that's what we are wired for. We are made for belonging, and when we belong we flourish, and when we don't belong our souls wither and die. And some of our souls here this morning are withering and dying because we just don't have a place of belonging. We are disconnected from the Triune God. Will you let Jesus, the Word of Life, lead you into the heart of God. He is the Way.

Now, I want you to notice, thirdly, and this is where it gets a little bit tough, I want you to notice the one non-negotiable that John lays down if we're really going to experience belonging. It is one non-negotiable that we can't duck and dive around. Watch, it's going to come up now on the screen. God is light. In God there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with God yet walk in the darkness we lie and we do not live by the truth.

Now, look at this sentence, so important, but if we walk in the light, if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, look what happens: we have fellowship. We belong. We experience belonging with one another, and then, what happens? The blood of Jesus, the redemptive power of Christ, His Son, begins to get at work in us, beginning to purify us from all sin. The one non-negotiable to really experience belonging is just to walk in the light. And that doesn't mean being perfect. To walk in the light simply means transparency, openness, honesty. It means I stop pretending, I stop being an imposter in the spirit. I take off my mask. I begin to walk in the light.

I think one of the hardest things to do sometimes in a church is just to walk in the light. Would you agree? Would you agree it's hard? You fight with your partner all the way to Mosaïek in the morning. You bump into me just outside. I say to you how it's going. You quickly grab her hand and you say we're fine. And you've been fighting all the way to church. We pretend!

If you came out to our community in Benoni, we've got a lot of groups that happen in the evening, recovering groups, people who are recovering from addiction, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous. Our whole church is

made up out of people who are anonymous. We're quite a mess. And, you know, I often put my head into the AA meeting or I go to the NA meeting, or I go to the Cocaine Anonymous, and I just sit there with these folk. And let me tell you, the meetings are messy.

And there's old Tom, and Tom puts up his hand. He says, my name is Tom and I'm an alcoholic, and I've had a terrible week. I've been terrible to live with. I've been hard to the kids, and I just feel terrible about myself. Mary puts up her hand. She says, my name is Mary, I'm an alcoholic. I really have struggled. I started drinking again this week. I need so much help. And you think to yourself, this is a mess. And then I leave this messy meeting and I go next door into the Fellowship Hall where some Christians are having a fellowship meeting, and there's not a sin in sight. No mention of sin, no mention of mess, no mention of failure.

And then I go to the car park and I stand in the car park, and I lean next to my Polo, and I say to Jesus, Jesus, where do You hang out on this property? Do You hang out in the AA room, the NA room, the CA room, or do You hang out in the Fellowship Hall? Where do You hang out? And I've never heard an answer, so don't get worried about me. I haven't heard an audible answer, but I have a hunch that Jesus would say to me, Trevor, I hang out in the AA room, the NA room, the CA room, because that's where people are walking in the light. That's where people are taking off their masks. That's where people are allowing themselves to be known, and that is where I am at work.

The last thing I want to say, and I'm going to move away from the passage now to another verse that you know, the last verse in second Corinthians. I want you to notice something. You know this verse so well. May the grace, says Paul, may the grace... Paul is looking at the Trinity and he's giving each person a characteristic. And he says the most important thing about Jesus Christ is grace. The most important thing is grace. The most important thing about God the Father is love. Now, what is the most important thing about the Holy Spirit?

Look: and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. And whenever I look at that I realise that what the Spirit of God is doing, the Spirit of God is always trying to draw us into fellowship, into belonging, into a shared life. Right now, right now, if you want to know what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in your life, the Holy Spirit is trying to draw you into a deeper belonging, because that is the purpose of the gospel, to belong to each other, to belong to the Father, to belong to the Son. And the Holy Spirit is trying to draw you, trying to draw me, into a deeper belonging ever moment of our lives, and we keep on resisting the Spirit.

Can I ask you this morning to cooperate with the Spirit? And you may say, Trevor, how do I cooperate, and I want to give you one word to take away with you, just one word. And if we can get hold of this one word the Spirit of God will take us into a profound sense of belonging. And the word is vulnerability. Do we have the courage to be vulnerable? Do we have the courage to be vulnerable? And as soon as I allow myself to become vulnerable the Spirit of God draws me into a deeper belonging. The vulnerability to say I'm sorry, to go to someone whom I've hurt and to say to that person, I am so sorry.

This week I had to do that. Someone that I love, care for very deeply, and I had to say to that person I am so, so sorry. And it's risky because the person may say I don't want to hear you're sorry. You're vulnerable, you're exposed, but something happens. Maybe it's becoming vulnerable enough to come along just to a small group with other Christians, and you're petrified of them. On a Wednesday night I look at Mosaïek folk gathering next to the restaurant, Werner bringing together folk from Mosaïek into small groups, and I can see how vulnerable people are. It's scary, but people are taking a step into community, into belonging.

It's the vulnerability sometimes just to take off your mask and to say, you know, I haven't got it all together. I do struggle. Will you pray for me? That's vulnerability, and as soon as I step into vulnerability the Spirit of God takes me into a deeper sense of belonging. It's the vulnerability of letting other people know me as I am. But perhaps the deepest vulnerability, and I end with this, perhaps the deepest, deepest vulnerability is to come before God and to take off all our masks of self-sufficiency, of arrogance, of happiness all together, of pretending that we know it all, just taking it all off and crying out to God and saying, God, I need You. I need You in my life.

I need Your living presence, I need Your living power, and I've discovered that as I allow myself to become vulnerable before God God's Holy Spirit begins to draw me into a deep belonging, deep belonging, with each other, with the Father, with the Son. So let me end. Jesus wants to give us a gift this morning. It's a gift of belonging. Belonging with others, in our families, in our friends, in our faith community, and belonging with the Father and with the Son. When we belong we flourish. When we don't we die.

Let's pray together. God, we try to speak about things that really matter, and we've spoken about deep things today, about that deep, deep need, yearning, that you put in each one of our hearts to belong. And some of us here this morning have been deeply hurt by relationships, and there's been heartache and heartbreak, and we want to say, never again, never again. And yet, even as we become isolated we know we're dying. Lord Jesus Christ, will You draw us today into a deeper belonging? May we hear that this is really what the purpose of the Gospel is all about, You, Jesus, meeting us where we are and drawing us into an honest belonging with other recovering sinners, with people who sniff, and we can bring our sniff to You as well.

Help us to walk in the light with You and with each other that we may begin to experience this gift of belonging. Come, Spirit of God, Holy Spirit, come, Spirit of God, and draw us today out of our lonely, isolated, individualistic lives and draw us into a deep moment of belonging. This is our prayer and we offer it to You with all the love and with all the longing of our hearts in the name of Christ our Lord, and together we say, amen.

May the joy of Christ, friends, be with you. God bless, take care. God bless.