

John 18:33-38a

Belonging

Jesus is the truth

When I was a pre-schooler, I decided that I would run away from home. Turns out I tried this on more than one occasion when I was very young. My mom recalled that on this particular occasion I got mad and decided I was running away on a cold and snowy winter's day. So, she helped me gather up a number of items that would be needed for my leaving home and together we packed up the toboggan.

At the time we lived on a yard site in the country and the driveway was very long. It was only much later in life when she told the story, I realize that she had delayed the packing long enough and timed things so that I would be meeting my dad at the end of the driveway as he came home from work. She could also watch me the entire way from a window.

Now this is a time before cell phones and so she could not call Dad and tell him to watch out for me. He just knew enough that, when he saw me at about four-feet tall pulling my loaded and long toboggan bundled up in my snowsuit, that he should stop and check out what was going on. Of course Mom knew that by the time I got to the end of the road and saw Dad, I would likely be easily convinced to get in the truck and return to the family to which I belonged.

Today it might not be considered wise to help your child pack up her stuff to leave, as the child might believe they were not wanted and be scarred for life. Rather one would say "no" to the solution of running away and explain to the child that, we belong together as a family, and even when we get frustrated or angry, we need to work things out and stay together.

There is a lot of research that has been done regarding belonging and how important it is to our well-being. One might be surprised that there is a need to do such work, in fact as recently as 1995 Baumeister and Leary proposed *the belongingness hypothesis*. They suggested "that human beings have an almost universal need to form and maintain at least some degree of interpersonal relationships with other humans. According to the theorists, belongingness is an innate quality with an evolutionary basis, and would have clear survival and reproductive benefits."¹ Again, there must have been a need to spell it

¹ Baumeister RF, Leary MR. (1995). "[The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation](http://www.psychologyconcepts.com/belongingness-hypothesis)". Psychol Bull. May, 1995;117(3):497-529.
<http://www.psychologyconcepts.com/belongingness-hypothesis>. Accessed November 24, 2018.

out for people, but most of us realize that to be emotionally healthy humans we need to feel we belong.

For most of us, our first place of belonging is in our families. Sadly, it is not always the best beginning, and so some will find a place to belong on the streets, or with those whose influence causes harm but makes them feel a part of something. Gangs exist because they give people a place to belong. Organizations of all kinds from service groups, to figure skating, hockey, curling and yacht clubs, painting, 55 plus centers, and churches all give people a place to belong. Belonging brings meaning into our lives both by our giving of ourselves and by our receiving from others.

In verse 37 of this reading from the Gospel of John Jesus says, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Again, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." The first question we might ask is, "what is 'the truth' to which we belong?"

Throughout this Gospel, John's reason for writing has been to testify to the truth of who is Jesus. It is something very different for us to think of truth being embodied in a person rather than a quantitative thing. We understand $2+2=4$. We know that to be true. In carpentry, if something is "true" it is even, level, or symmetrical.

Still, truth can be very subjective where people are involved. In a court of law, the job is to get to the truth of a matter. I haven't been in a court of law recently to know, but at one time people would have to swear on the Bible and respond to the question, "do you promise to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" Yet, often it is very hard to uncover the whole truth.

If we describe someone as true, we are referring to one whose character is that of being reliable, honest, faithful, one who keeps promises. Still none of these things really brings us to understanding of what it means to *belong* to the truth. Even as Pilate questions Jesus, in this second of seven scenes of the trial before Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate asks, "What is truth?"

It is not possible to talk about this passage without referring back to other parts of the gospel. In John 14:6 Jesus says about himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know the Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." In John 10:14-16 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd And I lay down my life for the sheep...and they will listen to my voice." In John 18 Jesus brings these two parts together with, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

How would we know Jesus' voice in order to listen to it?

Working backwards through the text we know that Jesus is being questioned about whether or not he is king of the Jews. You see if Jesus is truly a king then he is a political threat to Pilate. Pilate wants to keep his position of power and prestige as the authority for the Roman government in the area. If Jesus is considered a king then that is a direct challenge to Pilate's own claim. And if Pilate doesn't placate the growing mob that has

gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover, he could have a riot on his hands and his authority undermined in that way.

Jesus' answer to Pilate is that "My kingdom is not from this world, if my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here?" (v36). An aside, please do not think in this that Jesus disapproved of Jews. He was one himself and almost every part of his ministry was with the Jewish people. This is a statement about the temple authorities that wanted to Jesus put on trial rather than a commentary about an entire race.

What Jesus is saying here is that there is a kingdom that is unlike anything that can be understood by earthly powers. In fact, Jesus links what is happening to him now to his birth saying, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth" (v37). To understand this, we must circle right back to the beginning of the Gospel of John, and some of the most profound words written in the scripture,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and *truth*. (John 1:1-4, 14)

Jesus was the Word. Jesus is the Word. Jesus will always be the word. Our three readings today link this through David talk about his lineage in the Book of 2nd Samuel 23:1-7, the passage read today in which Jesus is speaking, and the one in Revelation 1:4b-8, in which Jesus lives on, providing a link to this past, present, and future understanding of Jesus. Jesus is truth. Jesus is co-creator with God the Father. Jesus is life.

For some, Jesus is the most difficult part of God to grasp. They question why Jesus had to die such a horrible death. How a loving God could let someone die like that. But right from the beginning Jesus choose to participate in the redemption of the world. He did this knowingly. It didn't make it easy. In his humanity it was excruciatingly painful emotionally, spirituality, and physically.

Some say that Jesus was a good man and a powerful teacher, but could not possibly have been a Saviour. Yet a band of 11 men and a few women would not let the story go. They shared it, were threatened, beaten and killed because of it. It is difficult to imagine that they would go to their deaths for something less than the truth and for something that was not of profound significance to them.

We may not understand fully what it means that Jesus is the truth, we may spend a lifetime straining to hear his voice, still there is something that calls deep within us. A longing to belong, a desire to belong to the truth. For those of us who call ourselves Christians, that truth is Jesus. To listen to his voice is to care for others, to love, to drive

past the fear that sees another as alien or foreign, to believe that we are children of God, as is every person we encounter and beyond.

What is truth? Jesus is truth, his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Truth is that there is a kingdom that is not of this world. We live in this world, we are called to be the hands and feet of God in this world, we are to participate in this world, for it is God's creation, but it is not the only realm in which we live and will live. Will we have it all figured out in this life? The answer is "no." But we can trust that if we let Jesus reign in our hearts, minds, bodies, and life we will come to understand more fully our belonging to the truth and grown in our ability to listen to Jesus voice. And we ask it in Jesus' life-giving name. Amen.