

We Belong to Christ

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Jesus Prays for His Disciples

⁶ "I have revealed you (Your name) to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

The passage is the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus right before his arrest. Jesus knew His time was coming and prayed for His disciples. As a matter of fact, Jesus prayed for us who follow Him today. In His prayer, He claim us to be His own. We belong to Christ. Those who belong to Jesus are part of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the Church.

Origin of the word "Church"

Everyone knows the word "church". But what is the meaning of the word "church"? Where did it come from? In the New Testament, the meaning of "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia" from which we get "iglesia" in Latin and Spanish. It means "the Called-out Ones." The church is a community of people who are called out from the world to follow, worship, live, and witness for Jesus.

The etymological roots of the word "church", however, comes from the German word "Kirke", from the Old Norse "Kirkja". It comes from another Greek word "kuryakos" meaning "belonging to the Lord". It could mean a community or a building that belongs to Jesus Christ. As such, we as Irvington Presbyterian Church, are a community of believers belonging to Jesus.

How does one belong to Christ?

To belong to Christ is to obey His Word. In the prayer of Jesus, He uses three verbs to describe those who belong to Him. In verse 6, Jesus said that those who belong to Him "obey" God's word. To obey means to live out God's word in our lives. The Bible is the Word of God. It constantly points the reader to Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but through Him.

To belong to Jesus is to accept and believe Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. Jesus prayed, "For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me (17:8).

To accept means to receive what Jesus is offering us, which is forgiveness of sin. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins - no matter how heinous the sin, he took punishment on our behalf. In order to receive forgiveness, you only need to ask for forgiveness and confess that you are a sinner. The Bible tells us that if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The proof of our forgiveness is in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Because He rose from the dead, Jesus showed us His ultimate power over evil. He has the power to impart life - eternal life; He said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

To obey, accept, and believe boils down trusting in Jesus. It means committing your life to Him, admitting to Jesus that your life is a mess and that you don't know how to piece it together. The future might be bleak, you might be scared, anxious, hurt, angry, or even hungry. And Jesus cares. He cares enough to have died for you. Thus, to trust Jesus is to come to Him and lay down your burdens at His feet and belong to Him. There is no need to carry your burdens. Our soul is restless until it finds rest in Jesus.

To belong is to matter

A sense of belonging is an emotional need that cannot be diminished. It reduces anxiety, depression, hopelessness, loneliness, and even suicidal thoughts. A study by Nathaniel M. Lambers, Stillman, Kamble, et.al. found a strong positive correlation between having a sense of belonging and having a sense of meaning. Their conclusion is that participants with a strong sense of belonging have the highest levels of perceived meaning in life.

Jesus offers His followers a meaningful and purposeful life (John 10:10). To belong to Christ is to find meaning in life.

To belong is to change

Before I immigrated to the United States, I would receive Disneyland postcards sent by family and friends. Back then, US visas were hard to get. I was not a citizen in the US then – in a way, I didn't "belong" – which meant that I couldn't just fly to the country and visit Disneyland. But when my family and I were granted permanent residence visas, we knew then that we belonged in this country. And one of the first things we did when we arrived in the US was visit Disneyland. As a matter of fact, now we can go anywhere in the country. To belong is life changing.

How am I changed when I belong to Jesus? Jesus prayed for three life-changing benefits for those who follow Him - protection, joy, and sanctification.

How does being protected by Jesus change our lives? Those who follow Christ are protected by the power of God's name (v.11-12). And when you belong to Jesus and are under his protection, you live with confidence. During the pandemic, many of us got the COVID vaccinations to protect ourselves. As such, we can now live with confidence, albeit, responsibly. The power of Christ's resurrection proves to the world

that Jesus is God's Son and that He is powerful enough to protect us from evil. We live our lives confident that whatever happens, God has our back.

To belong to Jesus is live with joy. Jesus prayed that we will have the "full measure" of His joy (v.13). The joy that Jesus offers us is not just a slice of the "Joy Pie" so to speak, but the entire pie - the full measure. It is a heavenly, transcendent joy that is not tethered to the circumstances of our lives.

The combination of living with confidence and living with the fullness of joy produces peace that surpasses all understanding. It keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus who is risen from the dead. The inevitability of our own physical death is no longer a deterrent for living a full, confident and joyful life.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be "sanctified" (v.17,19), which means that belonging to Jesus is to live with distinction. The word "sanctified" is church language - what does it mean? It means to set apart. We do this every day. We budget our income by setting apart money for food, rent or mortgage, for tithe and offering, for other essentials, and for savings. We have distinct outfits set apart for different occasions - for home, for parties, for church.

To be sanctified means to be set apart from the rest. It means to live with distinction. When someone receives the Medal of Honor, it means he or she is set apart from the rest of the troop because he or she has performed a sacrifice above and beyond the call of duty. This distinction sets the person apart.

When you are sanctified, it means you are set apart from the rest of the world. It means that we are set apart from this sinful world and live in God's light and love. We are called to live a distinguished life patterned after God's Word, towards the image of Christ.

Becoming Christ's ambassadors in a COVID world

Jesus sets us apart for Himself because he also calls us to be His ambassadors in a COVID world. An ambassador is a person assigned to represent a nation or to advocate for a specific cause. We are called to be Christ's ambassador, exuding confidence, joy and distinction. In this way, we represent more than just ourselves.

In season one, episode eight of the Netflix series, *The Crown*, on the life of Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen travels to Ceylon on a diplomatic tour. She appoints her sister, Princess Margaret, to be her representative for minor royal engagements. Princess Margaret takes the opportunity to "bring color and personality to the Monarchy." She speaks her own mind, jokes with the press, and belittles other dignitaries.

In one particular scene, the Prime minister, Winston Churchill, comes to rebuke the Princess, and relieve her of her duties as a representative. He explains to her that she was not appointed to represent herself.

Prime Minister Churchill: Your Royal Highness, when you appear in public, performing official duties, you are not you.

Princess Margaret: Of course I'm me.

Prime Minister Churchill: The Crown. That's what they've come to see, not you.

You and I are Christ's ambassador in a COVID world. Many are distressed or suffering. Many have lost loved ones, been orphaned, or are suffering serious financial loss. We should strive to be Christ's

ambassador of peace, joy, and hope; be the bearer of good news that Jesus is the Savior of the world and our Healer. Let us bring those whom God has brought to your life before Him in prayer and be Christ's confident and joyful ambassador to your family, friends, neighbors, and beyond. **Amen. Amen.**