

Feb. 20, 2011

1 Corinthians 3: 10-11, 16-23

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

I don't know how many of you watch the show, "Glee" but I do, and I really enjoy it! It has dancing, singing, and interesting characters. Sometimes the story lines are a little weird, but I find it entertaining.

The part of it that intrigues me the most, I think, is that it focuses on a diverse group of misfits, nerds you might say. In glee club they all find a place to belong. People who don't fit in anywhere else are in class with football players. The cheerleaders are side by side with the other girls.

They are drawn together by a common purpose, a common goal of performing song and dance numbers that are very impressive.

Everyone finds a place to belong in Glee. Kids who would otherwise have a miserable experience in high school are rescued by the sense of belonging they find in glee club.

There, they can sing to express themselves, they can find an outlet in dancing, and they can feel proud of themselves when their team does well in competition.

They form strong friendships and work through their problems. Sometimes one is bullied and the others stick up for them. Sometimes a heart is broken and the others offer sympathy and support.

Glee becomes a family, a place to belong, for kids who otherwise might fall into depression or hopelessness.

Belonging to glee means that the hard parts of life are a little easier for this group of teenagers.

Belonging is a basic human need. Once our basic physical needs are met and our need for safety is answered, we need love, affection, and a place to belong.

Belonging----none of us want to be really alone and on our own. Being by ourselves now and then is okay. Feeling lonely is not.

I think our need for belonging is why many of us really don't like to move to a new city or even to walk into a room full of strangers.

Maybe we won't belong there. Maybe we won't fit in, won't find friends, won't find anyone who cares about us.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he is addressing the problem of a division among the people. Some are claiming to belong to Paul, and others are saying they belong to Apollos.

Paul answered that in the passage we heard last week by saying that he planted and Apollos watered, but God gave the growth, and then he says that he laid the foundation which is Jesus Christ, and Apollos built on it.

He goes on to call the church “God’s holy Temple” where the Holy Spirit lives. And he ends by saying that we belong to Christ and that Christ belongs to God

He is speaking to us, too, you know. This church is also God’s holy Temple and the Holy Spirit lives here.

If we don't always feel like we can be called God's holy Temple because of things we do or say, then we can still be sure that we belong here, because we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

God has adopted us as beloved children, children who are always welcome in God's house, even if we have squandered our inheritance by living apart from God, by cutting ourselves off from his love.

Like the prodigal who returned home, we can always return. We will always be welcomed with open arms when we come home where we belong.

In our scripture reading from Luke this morning, we find Jesus at twelve years old spending time in the Temple in Jerusalem. His parents search frantically for him, expecting him to be with friends or relatives in the crowd.

It was so natural for Jesus to be in the Temple, in “his father’s house,” that he had lost track of time and didn’t realize that his parents would be leaving Jerusalem already and heading back to Galilee.

Jesus felt like he belonged in the Temple so much that he was dumbfounded that his parents didn’t know where he was! He just couldn’t understand why it wasn’t obvious to them! OF COURSE he would be in the Temple! Where else would he be?



And so he asked them, “Didn’t you know that I would be in my Father’s house?”

It was just so very obvious to him. It was obvious because he belonged there, maybe more than he belonged anywhere else.

He belonged where people talked about God, prayed to God, thought about God, worshipped God

Because that’s where his heart was---with God.

And so he belonged in the Temple---with God.

Here at Linda Vista church, I think most of us feel like we belong here. For many of you, your families are here. Friends are here. People you have known for a long time are here.

Those of you who are newer, and even those of you who have been here for quite a while, I want you to remember the first time you came, if you can.

Some of you came because you had relatives here, and that's a little different. But even with that level of comfort, I'm sure you had some concerns about whether or not this would be the right church for you, whether or not you would belong here.

A few months ago I greeted a visitor at the door of the church as she arrived for the worship service.

She sat down in the pew for a few minutes. I saw some of you greet her. But suddenly she got up and rushed back past me, out the door.

For some reason her anxiety about being here got the better of her. I don't think she felt like she belonged for some reason.

It wasn't anything anyone said to her, I'm sure of that. It wasn't that people ignored her. I don't know what it was. Maybe she was very uncertain of being in any church. I hope and pray that she found somewhere else where she felt like she belonged.

Other visitors have come and stayed. Our friend Dorothy comes to visit from Pennsylvania every year. Cynthia Benedict came last fall and she told me she felt right at home. She has been off visiting family, but I think she will be back.

Those of us who are here ---- I know you feel like you belong, and if any of you don't feel that way, come and talk to me about it. We hope and pray that our visitors find a sense of belonging here, but that's not always going to happen. We just do the best we can.

And the way we can do that is to believe that everyone who comes through our doors comes at the invitation of God. Because they have been invited by the one whose house this is, they belong here!

If we believe they belong, and we act like they belong, they just might feel the same way, too.

Sometimes they might feel like they don't belong no matter what we do. But sometimes, if we believe they belong, they will begin to believe it, too!

Now maybe some of you have your own doubts about whether or not you belong in God's holy temple at all.

Maybe you worry that you aren't a good enough Christian, that you are not worthy of being in the house of God.

The Corinthians were concerned that some people among them were not as good as the rest of them. Maybe you are worried that you're not as good as other people here.

Paul's answer to any of that kind of thinking is clear----

We all belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God!

There are no requirements for being good enough, no minimum number of hours spent in prayer, no demands for how much of the Bible you have read.

We all belong! Everyone who walks through our doors belongs!

We all belong here, in the house of God, the Temple of God, because we all belong to Christ! We are all God's beloved children!

When our need for belonging and love and affection is met, we can come to a point where we can accept God's love as well as the love of the people around us. This is the best kind of evangelism there is!

Here, I see young people who have grown up believing because they belong. The little ones among us today are also growing up feeling that this is a comfortable, safe place.



And adults, too, can grow into faith because they feel that they belong here.

If you don't believe that you belong to Christ, if you can't quite accept that God loves you as his own precious child, consider this----you belong in this place, this house of God. People here love you and care about you and pray for you.

You belong!

And if you are having a hard time feeling like you belong anywhere, this is place for you.

Like Glee, this is a safe place, a place for people who maybe don't fit well in other places. This is, in every sense of the word, a sanctuary.

A week or so ago, I saw an episode of the tv show Glee that illustrated this thought very dramatically.

Coach Sue Sylvester, who coaches the cheerleaders, is a sworn rival, actually an enemy, of Glee club. Many episodes revolve around her efforts to somehow prevent glee from going to competitions or to get people to have to quit glee or to shut down their latest production.

And so this episode was surprising! Coach Sue was seriously depressed and the suggested cure for her depression was to spend a week sitting in on Glee class, to watch the kids sing and dance.

The teacher of glee club convinced her that this would help her find the enjoyment and joy of life again, that it would restore her spirits.

Long story short---it worked! By the end of the week, Sue was part of a big song and dance number, a song that she had suggested and that expressed her feelings. She was right in the middle of it, singing surrounded by the class. She clearly enjoyed every minute of it!

Even though the class had serious reservations about letting her be part of the class, in the end they accepted her and made her feel welcome and safe---and at home!

Welcome home, everyone! Welcome home to God's house, where everyone belongs. Believe it, feel it, know it in your heart of hearts.

You belong in the Temple, because you belong to Christ, who belongs to God! AMEN!