

January 26, 2014  
1 Corinthians 1:10-18  
Matthew 4:12-23

In Life and in Death, We BELONG TO GOD

In life and in death, we BELONG TO GOD. This Sunday we are focusing on the last three words of our one sentence statement of faith, the belonging to God part. We have covered life. And we've covered death. We have covered how necessary it is that we are part of a WE together. But hold on to your hats. These last three words in our faith statement are taking it to a whole other level. Because they are about God. And the meaning of everything.

In life and in death, we belong to God. We BELONG TO GOD. That's the main phrase of this statement of faith. The first part 'in life and in death' is what you call a prepositional phrase. It's a group of words that modify what comes after. They describe and explain the main verb and its indirect object. That's right. I paid attention in English class. The main part of our sentence, the bottom line of our faith is that we belong to God. Who are we? We belong to God. Why are we here? Because we belong to God. How should we live? Like we belong to God. That's

what this is all about. That's what we are all about. We belong to God.

In life and in death. Now and forevermore. We belong to God.

Now when we say that we belong to God, we are saying that we belong to someone. We are not on our own. We are not in this alone. We are not anonymous or nameless or faceless. We belong to someone. We are important. We are valued. We are named and claimed and known by God. We belong to someone. I've noticed that when people meet each other in Kentucky, they talk about where they belong and their 'people'. The conversation goes something like this. My family is from Somerset, but my people are originally from McCreary county. "OH," says the other person, "Well, my sister in law has some family up there. Do you know the Duncans?" Actually, my aunt married a Duncan from that area. How about you? Where are you from? "Well, I'm from Bourbon county; I'm kin to the Clayton family." Oh, the Claytons. My brother did some work for Frank Clayton up near Paris. You must know Frank and his wife Louise. "Actually, we tailgate next to them up at Commonwealth Stadium." People in Kentucky like to figure out who you belong to.

And we like to do that, too. We like to figure out where people are from; we like to know who they belong to. And we like knowing that we belong somewhere, too. Which can be a hard thing to do nowadays. It can be tough in this world to actually feel like we belong anywhere. With so many things shifting and changing. With so much we don't know and so much we can't control and so many relationships that break down. Do you ever wonder if you belong? At work or at school or at home? Do you ever feel unwelcome? Or unappreciated? Do you ever feel like you don't know anyone and they don't know you? If you've ever felt that way, you are not the only one. The world is full of lonely people who feel like they don't belong anywhere. Whether they are new to a community or their people have been here for hundreds of years. So many of us are longing to belong somewhere to someone.

Here we believe that we do belong to someone. We believe that we, you and me and all of the other human beings around us in the world, belong to God. We belong to someone. We belong to the God who created us.

The God who named us as his own. The God loves us. Who speaks over us at our baptism, saying: you are my child. You are part of my family.

And with you, I am well pleased. In our baptisms, we are anointed and marked as God's own forever. We belong to God. and until we know that, until we know who we belong to, our hearts will be restless, as St. Augustine writes, until they find their rest in God.

We belong to God, but so often we forget that. We belong to God, but other things butt in. Other gods, other kings, other powers and principalities, with billboards and advertisements; they would like us to think that we belong to this world, that we belong to them. You do not belong to God, they say. You belong to beauty and fashion. You belong to nice hair and skinny jeans and ironic beards. You don't belong to God. You belong to this energy drink and that tough looking pickup. You don't belong to God. You belong to the opinions of your peers and the pressures of what everyone else is doing. You do not belong to God. You belong to your race, your age, your gender, your weight, your marital status, your sexual orientation. You do not belong to God. You belong to your GPA at school. You belong to your afterschool activities and your schedules. You do not belong to God. You belong to work. You belong to your productivity and your income. You don't belong to

God. You belong to your kids' achievements, to your achievements, to your bank account, to your email account. You don't belong to God. You belong to your diagnosis and your prognosis and the pills you take. You don't belong to God. You belong to your mistakes and your addictions and your failures. You don't belong to God. You don't belong to anyone. You belong to this world and its stuff and that's all you will amount to. But we say, no. No. That's not how this goes. We do not belong to this world. We do not belong to any of that stuff. We belong to something else. We belong to someone else. We belong to God. We belong to God. We do not belong to just anyone. We belong to God. And not just any God. We belong to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Not the god who lives on Mt Olympus feasting and laughing and ignoring the travails of humanity. And not the god of War who urges his followers to ride forth and smite their enemies. And not the god in an elaborate temple demanding endless sacrifices to feed her insatiable need for attention. The God we belong to is not just any God. It is the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Who came into this world because our God so loved the world. Because our God wanted to heal the sick and

find the lost and free the oppressed and bring us back home. And give us the entire Kingdom of Heaven. Our God comes to us in Jesus Christ because God's deep unfathomable love that let God won't be God without us.

We belong to that God. The God who won't give up. Who won't give up on us. Who won't give up on our enemies. Who cares for the weak and the small. Who seeks humility rather than greatness. Who serves others rather asking to be served. What kind of a crazy god does that? The kind who says, look for me among the hungry and the thirsty and the sick and naked and imprisoned. Look for me among the suffering and the humiliated. Look for me among the lonely and broken. That's where I'll be. I'll be with you. All of you. Taking up my cross for you. Taking away the sin of the world. For you. So you can belong to me. Because you do belong to me.

We belong to God. It's what the world most needs to hear. It's the message we have been given as the church. And it is good news. Today, a group of us went into Lexington to help out with the Sandwich Ministry at Maxwell St. Presbyterian Church. We bagged up about 120

lunches then we went down to Rupp Arena and we handed them out. To person after person after person. And let me tell you there is nothing more humbling than looking at someone that the world doesn't love, and that doesn't feel loved and doesn't feel like they belong anywhere and recognizing that feeling because you know it in yourself. And saying as you hand out sandwiches, you belong to God. You are loved by God. You are claimed by God. Just like me. We belong to God. Not because I say so. Not because a church says so. But because God says so. And that's what it's all about. That's the bottom line. The main sentence. It's who we are and what we believe and why we do what we do.

We belong to God. And as the church, sometimes we need to be reminded of that. That we belong to God. Not to the world. Not to ourselves. Not to our successful ministries. Not to a preacher or a teacher of the faith. We belong to God. The apostle Paul had to remind the Corinthians of that. They had gotten all split up into factions with differing theologies. Some of them were saying "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," (who is the apostle Peter) or I belong to Christ. What's going on, says Paul? Has Christ been

divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? You don't belong to anyone else but God. And neither does the church. And that means, if the church belongs to God, then it does not belong to us. If we belong to God, then we belong to God.

It makes me think about one of the most daring statements in our Book of Order. It says 'the Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.' Even at the risk of losing its life. This church does not belong to us. It belongs to God. And this church is here on God's mission, to seek the lost and bind up the broken hearted and be a light in the darkness. We are not our own. We are not here just to acquire new members. We are not here to meet our budget. We are here to be the body of Christ in the world. We are here to serve rather than be served. To do justice and love kindness, even at the risk of losing our life. To say to the world, you belong to God. And God is with and among you. You aren't alone. You aren't no one. You aren't nothing. You belong somewhere. You belong to someone. All of us do. We belong to God whose love is stronger than sin and greater than the

grave and more powerful than any power on earth. We belong to God. In life and in death, we belong to God.