

Announcement:

What: If you want to get to know Jesus better, we will use the Book of Mark as a tool to achieve that goal.

Who: No previous Bible Study needed. Open to all.

When: Wednesdays beginning October 3, at 6 PM.

Where: The Trinity Room. Rib Bye will facilitate.

Our Church has a Mission Statement. It is based on the initials for our Church:

- a “P” for Pontoppidan,
- an “L” for Lutheran,
- and a “C” for Church.

It is my responsibility as your Pastor to keep our Mission Statement before us. I do not always do a good job of that.

I have instructed Jennifer to put our Mission Statement somewhere in every Newsletter and every Bulletin beginning next week. [You can make a game of trying to find the Mission Statement each week and month!]

You know that every member of every organization should be able to state their Mission Statement. Many of you can rattle off the Mission of the places where you are employed.

So what is our Mission Statement? At great risk of embarrassing myself for not having kept it in front of us, let us together say our Mission Statement: ***“Proclaiming the Gospel – Living in Christ – Caring for our Neighbor.”***

This past summer I was thinking about our Mission Statement and I came across a set of three words: Believing, Belonging, Becoming. Many churches use these three words as their Mission Statements.

And I thought of how well those three “B” words fit our own Mission Statement:

- Proclaiming the Gospel: that is believing.
 - Living in Christ: that is belonging.
 - Caring for our Neighbor: that is becoming.
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Two weeks ago we looked at believing. We asked ourselves three questions:

1. Do you believe in a Creator?
2. Do you believe that the Creator is engaged in your life?
3. Do you believe that the Creator is deeply committed to you?

We answered every question with a resounding “yes!” Last week Rob Bye reminded us of how deeply committed God is to rescuing us – God the Son rescuing us like a shepherd rescues a lost sheep. That is what we believe.

This week we are looking at **belonging**. Now, for many of us, emailing has become a form of belonging; a way of connecting. There is this group out there we spend time with electronically. Some of us have become addicted to this form of belonging.

My wife accused me the other week of being addicted to email. So I did a little research, just in case I might have a slight tendency towards this addiction. Here are some signs **that we may be overly hooked on e-mail**:

- We wake up and check email. [I once sent an early email to someone, and they sent back an immediate email saying, “What are you doing emailing this time of the morning?!” I asked him the same question. Two addicted people?]
 - We can't make it through the night without checking email. [So the last thing we do before pulling down the covers is pull in the emails.]
 - We can't live without email! [I got an email from Amy Anderson that said, “Yiiippeee! After 3 weeks we are back online.” My first thought was: 3 weeks! I could never go that long!!! You can't live without email.]
 - We have multiple email accounts. [The average email user has 2.8 email accounts they check: a work account, a personal account, maybe another home account. 2.8. I have 3.0 email accounts!]
 - And last, we may be hooked on email if we check it anytime, anywhere. [I learned while checking to see if I was addicted to email that 1% of people check email while at church! We will have about 300 in worship this morning, so that means that statistically 3 of you will be checking your email; hopefully not during the sermon...]
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Here is the point of all that: God made us to do more than connect electronically. God made us to connect physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That is why God wants us to have a spiritual home and to be active in that spiritual home.

The Bible says it this way: *“This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You’re no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone.”* [Ephesians 2:19 The Message] Underline that last sentence...

What happens when we do not take belonging seriously? Most of us, if we are honest with ourselves, have had seasons of not belonging, and we know the feelings of not belonging well.

- There may have been a time when you were an ugly duckling teenager and you did not belong to the group you wanted to be a part of. You knew the three things I am going to mention in a moment.
 - There may have been a time when you moved into a new neighborhood or a new job. Everyone looked at you as an outsider, as someone who did not belong.
 - There may have been a time when you could not bring yourself to walk through a doorway, because you did not feel that you belonged on the other side of the door. It might have been the door of someone you thought was a friend, or the door of a job you were not comfortable in, or even the door of a church. You know the feelings of not belonging.
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What happens when we do not belong? We have these three pains in our hearts:

- Longing. Longing means to “feel a strong desire for something not likely to be attained.” We may long for a home – a true home. We may long for a touch. We may long for a kind word or even just a kind smile. When we do not belong we have these strong needs that are always out of our grasp: longings.

- The second pain when we do not belong: Losses. A loss in this case means “the harm resulting from separation.” My son at college text messaged me this week and I realized again that there is a loss there. I am glad he is well on his way to being the person God created him to be, but... I no longer belong in his life the way I once did. That is a loss.
- The third pain when we do not belong: Loneliness. A girl in an orphanage was seen putting a letter in a tree. The Orphanage Director checked the letter a little later. The letter simply said, "From Susan. To whomever finds this letter, I love you."

You and I meet as many people in one year as our great-grandparents met in their entire lifetimes. Yet we experience far more loneliness than they did.

Emails and chat rooms do not necessarily meet the needs of belonging. They do not meet the requirements of physical, emotional, and spiritual connections.

Which is why Jesus said, “Come and be my disciple.” [Mark 2:14] And now I have the Good News for this morning: the benefits of belonging to the Family of God.

Benefits of Belonging to a Church Home:

1. Growing out: worship and evangelism.

When a man who was paralyzed was brought to Jesus, Jesus first forgave his sins, and then gave him the gift of healing. This tells us that to God forgiveness is a really big deal.

It is a big deal because sin causes us to centered on ourselves.

- The most important person in the world becomes myself.
- The most important decisions are all about how I am affect.

If you do not belong to a church family, who is going to call you to account that you are a sinner? Who is going to declare to you that you can be forgiven and start fresh again? Who is going to invite you to amend your ways?

The Reformers said that sin is turning into one's own selfish self. How often do these things about sin come up in every day settings?

But when you belong to a church family you have the opportunity time and again to grow out of yourself – to acknowledge sin and hear forgiveness, and become a part of something larger than self.

2. Growing deep: discipleship and fellowship.

A second benefit of your Church Home is that there is the opportunity to sink down deep roots in rich soil.

This past week I sat down with Pam McGee and Kim Thompson. Pam is our Director of Discipleship and Kim will soon be, I believe, our Director of Fellowship. I came away from those meetings inspired!

- Pam talked about a Noon Meeting when people can come together and talk about the Bible story of Jonathan taking initiative and trusting God, and the results of that initiative and trust.
- Kim talked about putting together a memory book of the 130th Anniversary in two weeks, and of having a Sunday morning when the coffee drinkers and the Sunday School kids spent a morning together between the services.

God wants us to come together, to grow deep. That happens when we actively belong to a Family of Faith.

3. Growing up: ministry.

A third benefit of your Church Home is that it is a place to grow up. The Message Bible says: *“So come on, let’s leave the preschool finger-painting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. Grow up in Christ...”* [Hebrews 6:1]

Some of the best advice I have ever received have the two words: “Grow up.” I heard it from school teacher sand Sunday School teachers and parents and Boy Scout leaders and band and music teachers and grandparents and...

They were right. God did not create us so that we could just make a living. God created us to grow up spiritually: to grow up in Christ.

Last Sunday one of our kids who grew up in this church – and is now a second year student at MSUM – heard Wade Mitzel speak about the Operation Christmas Child.

She [Justine] went out of her way to track down Wade and ask, “How can we get involved on the college campus?” Isn’t that great!

What does God want you to do? God wants you to grow up and as you grow opportunities will come. Your Church Home can be a place of growing up.

God created the Church as a place of belonging: of Living in Christ: a place to grow out, deep, and up.

If you do not have a Church Home we invite you to make Pontoppidan the place where you grow out and grow deep and grow up into Christ.

We happen to have a new member class – called Class 101 – next Sunday afternoon at 4 PM. You are invited. **Let us pray...**