

## Sermon for Earth Day Sunday

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Grace Church in Scarborough

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“You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, they follow me and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”

Belonging is the centre of this reading for me.  
I want to ask what it means to belong.

Some of you belong to a family. What does that mean for you? How does that make you different from people who are not members of your family?  
Some of you are members of other organizations. We have people who belong to the Free Masons, to the Scout and Guide movements, to Parish Council, to the Liberal party of Canada, to one of the various professional associations.  
What does it mean to you to belong to these? How does it make you different from other people who are not members?

When I was a child my family moved around a lot. I went to 12 different grade schools. It was not till I was in Secondary, or High School, that I felt I belonged. Not belonging left me on the edges, fending for myself, unsure of what the rules of the class or the school were. I think that I looked like I fitted in, and seemed to be part of the uniform-wearing body, but it was not until High School, where I spent 7 years, that I felt I really belonged. What does that mean? What was the difference from not belonging?  
It was about being woven into the life of the school. I knew people. I had friends, and knew them as long as anyone else had known them. I trusted people and they trusted me. There was no question in my head or my heart. I belonged to Henbury School. And the school belonged to me. It was my school. These were my friends, and I was their friend. It could be counted on. My best friend from school, Graham, is someone I know I could call on for help. I know he would leave his home and fly to Canada for me if I needed him. And I would fly to his home for him if he needed me. That is belonging.

It was when, as a young man, I met God in Jesus that I felt that again. I had never experienced being known so well before. In meeting Jesus in the stories of the Gospels, he stopped being someone I was reading about, and became someone who was suddenly, utterly unexpectedly, alive for me. And he had always known me, and more, he loved me. I cannot say Jesus died for me, because my friendship with him is not past-tense, but a thing of the present. But I knew he would die for me if I needed it. He asked me if I would give my life to him. Would I belong to him? So when I said Yes, suddenly I belonged to him, to his father, to his body, the Anglican Church (and other churches too). That is why I cannot help liking you all. I belong to you!

So my question is “Do **you** belong to God?”

What does that mean for you? ? How does it make you different from other people who do not belong to Jesus?  
If you belong to Jesus does that mean you treat yourself, your body, your mind, your family differently?

“Belonging to Jesus” ..... belonging to him means you cannot also belong to some other people or things.

What, or who, do you let yourself belong to that clashes with belonging to him?

I cannot belong to Anti-Jewish, Anti-Moslem, Anti-Communist, Anti-Gay, Anti-anyone groups. Because my Jesus always hangs out with the bad kids, the outcasts, the sinners and shares food with them.

I cannot belong with pornographers, or with terrorists (government or private) or with companies that trade with the poor of the world in order to profit from them.

Who can you no longer belong with?

What can you no longer do if you belong to Jesus?

What are the differences that this membership of God’s family makes for you?

I cannot hang out with factory chicken carcasses! This was a shock that hit me about 10 years ago.

Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

Genesis tells the story....“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and behold it was good!”

Adam (*literally Man*) gets his name from adama (*literally earth/soil*) God breathes life into Adam like Jesus

breathed eternal life into his disciples. Our English word "human" comes from "humus". We too belong to the soil.

John's telling of Jesus begins by saying, "In the beginning was the Word...All things came in to being through Him. Without Him not one thing came to be. What has come in to being in him was life, and the life is the light of the world."

It was a sudden revelation for me one day that God's chickens were part of God. God's chickens were not supposed to live in lifelong darkness in a tight cage in terrifying levels of sound, filthy air and being fed chemically balanced food to fatten them for slaughter when they were barely out of childhood. Chickens, I realized, belong to God, and are also in the image of God. Can I buy and eat such a perverted and insulting treatment of God's creation? God made chickens to run about in the dirt, to hunt bugs, to get into fights and be rowdy, to shout at anything and everything and flock in families. That is a God's chicken.. a hen!

And God made the whole earth, and all that is in it. God made us. We belong to the earth and the earth belongs to us. Sometimes when I look at the way European Canadians clear-cut old growth forest so fast and furiously, I know it is for this years profit statements, and for this election periods job numbers. When we mine out all the gold, or extract the tar as quickly as possible, I get the feeling that we think we are passing through. If we believed we live here, in Canada, or on the planet, why would we use up, in a couple of generations, what it took thousands or millions of years to put in place?

Do you belong to God's creation? Do you care about what God, in millennia, has made, and from which we have miraculously come forth? What would Jesus have offered the disciples on the lakeshore if Russian factory ships had been able to get into the Sea of Galilee? Humorous I know, but do we not see the face of Christ in the children of the Somali fishermen whose ocean has been clear-cut by foreign trawlers, and now have turned to piracy in anger. Do we not see Jesus in the refugees from the spreading desert of the Sahara when the herds die of famine. Do we not see Mary, robed in an Inuit Parka as her hunting grounds melt and the life her people have lived forever slips away?

And maybe it is hard to see God in frogs and bats and mountain lions or grizzly bears. But these too are parts of the God, to whom I belong in Christ. When I am owned by him, then I am part of what is his.

When my species' greed and stupidity destroys these creations of God I cannot be silent, or worse, take the profits.

The first saying of Jesus I began with makes a note that belonging to God means we can hear his voice.

I know I have no desire to hear God's voice about his chickens. I much prefer to part with half the cash for something that looks exactly like a chicken in the supermarket. I like pollution-belching motor vehicles. I like having the heat on high. And whenever I sin.....(*think about this*)... it is by taking a moment to pretend I do not belong to God, and acting as if I were just alone in this world, doing whatever I please. It is then that I shut my ears to God's voice. I shut my ears and I leave his flock, if only for a moment.

But listen! The voice of God calls us to wonder and delight in all His works. The voice of God is mighty and breathes life into those who open their ears and hearts to hear it. The voice of the Lord calls us to righteousness of living, caring and being stewards of his garden. The voice of the Lord calls us to himself, and he says "Peace be with you"

This is Earth Day Sunday. "The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

And this is the **day** that the Lord has made, the Lord's Day, Sunday, our Sabbath Day.

Let us belong to God and to God's Creation.

This is the Creation the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and belong in Him.