

Easter 5 May 13-14, 2017 Mother's Day and 2nd Purpose:
Belonging

Well today is Mother's Day and Mother's Days can be tricky. Not all of us had good mothers and not all of us have had children. Some of our moms have died, some live in the same house with us and so there are all sorts of thoughts going through our minds on this day but I still thought I would give you an opportunity to tell your neighbor one thing that your own mom or a woman in your life that functioned like a mom did that you appreciated. It can be anything big or small, serious or funny.

EX: Whenever my dad had a business trip, my two sisters and I would sit on our parents' bed, stay up late, watch TV and share a whole bag of chocolate chips. I still think of those times when I see a bag of chocolate chips.

Give time to talk and share a few memories.

Great stories today. Share them with someone today. It is often our Mother who first teaches us what it means to belong in the family.

Last week I preached a sermon on the importance of worship. I used quite a bit of material from Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life. We have used his materials several times over the years, in worship and in small groups. Following worship a few of you said that you would like me to review what we had learned in those campaigns, so for this week and 3 more I'm going to preach on the rest of the 5 purposes of life. I have put a little bookmark in the pews that you can take home with you to help you remember those 5 purposes. If

you miss a week or two, remember all of my sermons are posted on our website.

The first purpose in a purpose driven life is worship. When we worship we put a smile on God's face. Our summer motto is going to be **In town; in church. When away, remember to pray.**

This week we are thinking about the second purpose of life: Belonging, belonging to the family of God. The opportunity to belong is one of the greatest gifts God give us. Belonging to a family can be one of the best ways for us to experience God's love. God doesn't want you to just believe in him but also to belong to him and to his family.

Timothy Paul Jones, co- author of Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace tells this story about his middle daughter who had been previously adopted by another family. Tim commented that he believed that this first adoptive family had the best of intentions, but somehow they never quite integrated their adopted child into the life of their family. After a couple of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and Timothy's family ended up welcoming the little eight-year-old girl into their home. This is how he tells the story about their trip to Disney World. *For one reason or another, whenever our daughter's previous family vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually — at least in the child's mind — this happened because she did something wrong*

And so, by the time we adopted our daughter, (she knew all about Disney world, the characters, rides and food) but, she had always been the one left on the outside. So of course her new family planned a trip to Disney world so that she could experience what she had missed, several times before. We might think that his new daughter would be really excited to go but the month leading up to their trip were really rough. She stole food,... She lied... She whispered insults ...to hurt her older sister— and so it went.

*Jones then says, A couple of days before our family headed to Florida, I pulled our daughter into my lap to talk.... “**I know what you’re going to do,**” she stated flatly. “**You’re not going to take me to Disney World, are you?**” The thought hadn’t actually crossed my mind, but her downward spiral suddenly started to make some sense. She knew she couldn’t earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that test several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.*

*In retrospect, I’m embarrassed to admit that, in that moment, I was tempted to turn her fear to my own advantage. The easiest response would have been, “**If you don’t start behaving better, you’re right, we won’t take you**” — but, by God’s grace, I didn’t. Instead, I asked her, “**Is this trip something we’re doing as a family?**”*

She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed.

*“**Are you part of this family?**”*

She nodded again.

*“**Then you’re going with us. Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what’s right and what’s wrong — but you’re part of our family, and we’re not leaving you behind.**”*

I’d like to say that her behaviors grew better after that moment. They didn’t. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Lake Buena Vista. Still, we headed to Disney World on the day we had promised, and it was a typical Disney day. Overpriced tickets, overpriced meals, and lots of lines, mingled with just enough manufactured magic to consider maybe going again someday.

*In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, pensive, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long facade of rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her, held her, and asked, “So how was your first day at Disney World?” She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. “**Daddy,**” she said, “I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn’t because I was good; it’s because I’m yours.” (Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace
By Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones*

This is what it means to belong in the kingdom of God.
This is what it means to belong to the family of God.

We belong, not because we are good but because we are God’s children.

The bible says: *God’s family is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15:b) All three lessons read today are descriptions of the struggles of God’s children becoming family.*

The Church is God’s family. It is a place to belong. Baptism is the sacrament of belonging. Today/tomorrow we will baptize/baptized little _____. In those 3 splashes of that tiny baby becomes/became a member of the family.

In Holy Communion we will share together in the family meal.

God gives us to one another, as gift.

Now you might be thinking of someone in your life who is driving you nuts and you're thinking "***some gift!***"

But that person is a loved child of God too and believe it or not, they are part of the family. And we can learn or grow from our experiences with difficult people and they from us. That's part of God's design.

So, God gives us to one another for our benefit.

Like,...So that we have help. No one can go it alone. We all have different talents and interests. We can help one another. Together we can do what we cannot do alone.

Also God gives us a spiritual family because our earthly families don't last. Families change, people move away, generations pass on. The only thing that will last forever is your spiritual family, God's family. I think about this when I visit elderly in nursing homes. One woman, Bertha, who had out-lived her family and friends in Fort Atkinson, told me "***I'm not lonely, God keeps putting new people in my life.***"

At the beginning of creation, God said, "***It's not good to be alone.***" From the beginning God created us to love one another and to be family and community.

And when we do, when we learn how to be family to one another, we put a smile on God's face.

This is the good news of the gospel. Amen.