

**St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA**  
**The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge**  
**Church Year C**  
**Date: 4/17/16**  
**Season: Easter 4**  
**John 10:22-30**

There is something deeply human about the want to belong. From the beginning human beings have joined together in families, in groups of hunter-gatherers, in tribes, in nations. We want to belong. In fact, the Bible tells us that when God created the first human being, God observed that “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a partner.” God knew that the man would want to **belong** to someone.

Who or what do you belong to? I belong to my wife and my children and grand children. I belong to my parents, even though I didn’t chose them and they are gone now. I’m glad I do, by the way, I’m just observing that we belong to someone or some things that we don’t choose, the way we choose, say, as a spouse or a friend.

Of course, I’m reminded of Groucho Marx famous quip, “I wouldn’t want to belong to any group that would have me as a member,” but that’s for another day.

So who we belong to and who belongs to us is really important. In fact, it defines us. So when we hear Jesus this morning telling the religious authorities who he belongs to, we need to pay attention. “The Father and I are one,” he says. He belongs to the Father and the Father belongs to him. It’s one of the main themes of John’s gospel, this intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father. All the way back in the first chapter, in the Prologue, we’re told, “No one has ever seen God. It’s God the only son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” God isn’t some abstract philosophical proposition. God has been and is being made known in this human person. The one who is as close to his Father as his own heart. The Father and the son **belong** to each other.

And it’s this intimate relationship that Jesus invites his friends to become part of. That’s another great theme of John’s gospel. Jesus is always inviting his listeners, whether they are the disciples or the religious authorities, or people in the crowd, to come into this same kind of intimate relationship with him that he has with the Father. He invites all of these to **belong** to him just as he belongs to the Father. And how does one **belong** to Jesus? By **believing**. Believing means belonging. Now, let’s be very careful and very clear here. When we hear Jesus talking about “believing” in John’s gospel, he’s not talking about giving mental assent to a set of intellectual propositions. He’s not saying, if you sign off on this particular creed or doctrine or dogma or political platform then you can belong. The word that gets translated as “believe” in John’s gospel is closer to “trust,” to “understand,” “to give one’s life to.” That’s a whole lot different than saying the Pledge of Allegiance. I know plenty of folks who call themselves “believers” but you

sure couldn't tell it by the way they live their lives. Because to give your life to Jesus, like the members of John's little community who are the audience for this gospel, to be a **follower**, to be one of his sheep, means a whole lot more than just admiring Jesus because he was virtuous and wise and because he's holy and seems to have done some pretty miraculous things. It means giving your life to Jesus, body, mind, and spirit. It means committing to actively living in his love. And it means loving others the way Jesus loves us. That's, after all, his only commandment to his friends in John's gospel. "Love one another as I have loved you." Pretty straight forward, but pretty daunting when you think about it. Because, a Jesus goes on to say, "No one has greater love than this. To lay down one's life for one's friends."

What in the world can that mean for you and me? We know that Jesus recognizes that this is his great life's work, to lay down his life for his friends. In John, that's how Jesus says that God will be glorified. When he, God's Son, the one through whom God is being made known is the world, gives everything – everything – for his friends. So have we fallen short, are we not real "believers" if we don't literally lay down our lives? If we don't martyr ourselves in some way? I don't think so. Because what we hear Jesus calling for throughout John gospel is not physical martyrdom. He's calling for commitment. He's inviting his friends and he's inviting you and me who want to be his friends, to commit ourselves to him and to his work. To **participate** with him just as he participates with the Father. As he and the Father are one so he invites his friends, you and me, to also be one with him and the Father. That's what it means to **belong**.

And **belonging** to Jesus is a continually unfolding feast. It brings with it the joy of discovery in childhood and youth. Just look at the faces and listen to the stories of our children and youth around here. What joy being with them as they discover the joy of belonging to Jesus. Belonging to Jesus as we mature brings with it the joy of serving and loving, and the joy of striving to live a virtuous and holy life – as hard as that is most of the time. It's a joy to have that as a goal, as something to live for. Belonging to Jesus in our last hours brings with it the consolation of his companionship as we look towards the conclusion of this chapter of our journey. And, belonging to Jesus brings the comfort and the hope of homecoming. Union with Jesus and the Father. Our one True Home.

And belonging to the church, we belong to Jesus. And belonging means a whole lot more than "being known to the Treasurer," as they say, and more than showing up every now and then. Belonging means committing to those acts of love and service that Jesus calls his followers to. It doesn't have to be heroic. Extending kindness to someone who's hurting. Handing out Neighbors In Need Bags. Intentionally praying for someone who is sick or grieving or sad. Preparing a meal when the men of Congregations for the Homeless are with us this summer. Small things that get us out of our own self-referential places.

I can tell you about belonging to Jesus as I experience that at St. Thomas Church, the love and the care and the compassion I have received here these last few weeks has been a revelation. I have experienced Jesus' love here. And I've experienced it in so many of you. You know, hearing someone say, "I'm praying for you" is a pretty profound experience. It's an experience of Jesus' love alive in the world.

So belonging to the Church, we belong to Jesus. It's a place where we can participate with Jesus in the work he continues to do in the world. In the power of the Resurrection, Jesus is alive and present and working in the world even as we speak.

And sometimes that work is being done through you and me.

So who do you belong to? Think about that today. Who do you belong to? Now ask yourself if you really, and I mean really and truly, belong to Jesus? Oh, he's ready to take you in. But you do need to commit. And if you commit, really commit to Jesus, how would that affect your other relationships? How would that affect the ones you belong to and the ones who belong to you?

You know, belonging to Jesus will really set you apart. You'll know you're special. I mean, everyone, and I mean everyone, gets the invitation. But not everyone takes him up on it.

No, your sense of belonging to Jesus is special and brings a special obligation. To share the life you are receiving. To share the love you are receiving. To love others just as you know Jesus loves you. And you don't have a moment to lose. Amen.