



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 21A, OCTOBER 1, 2023  
EZEKIEL 18:1-4, 25-32; PSALM 25:1-8; PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13; MATTHEW 21: 23-32

## BELONGING

**Philippians 2:1-13** *[If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

*who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death--  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

*Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.]*

The well-known author and researcher Brene Brown has spoken repeatedly of the deeply seated human need to belong—the deep desire to belong to something larger than ourselves; to ameliorate the modern disease of what she calls “spiritual disconnection,” but not at the cost of sacrificing their authenticity. “True belonging,” she says, “never asks us to change who we are. True belonging requires us to be who we are.”<sup>i</sup>

At its best, this is what the Church is designed to do and be—the connecting place where people can belong, to combat what Brene Brown says is our “diminishing sense of shared humanity” while forging the connections with one another and with Christ as the source of reconciling love and hope and compassion to be shared with us and all the world.

The mission of Saint Mark’s Cathedral is to be a place of belonging, a place of prayer

and connection, a community that proclaims that Christ of love and hope and compassion for all...and to do all “this” in ways that our authentic selves can come alive and flourish and be shared for the benefit of others, or as Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, to realize that “it is God who is at work in you.”

Paul is exhorting the church in Philippi to forge the connections and journey together, mindful of the Christ-like virtues of love and compassion and humility that will unleash their authentic gifts in the interest of others. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...” When he encourages them to be in full accord and of one mind, I don’t think he is saying extinguish all disagreement. All that does is stifle the authentic sense of belonging, and what follows is more spiritual disease of disconnection.

The *First Nations Version of the New Testament* is a modern translation, closely

following the original text but situates it in imagery that resonates with indigenous stories and values. Here is that translation of the first couple of verses from this passage from Philippians. Hear Paul's voice:

“As you walk the road with the Chosen One, have you gained from him courage for the journey? Have you found comfort in his love? Do you share together in his Spirit? Has his tenderness and mercy captured your heart? If so, then have the same kind of thoughts. Love with one heart. Join together in one Spirit. And walk side by side on one path. This will make my heart leap for joy.”<sup>ii</sup>

Walk side by side on one path. It is the path which Christ blazed for us and invites us to take as well. We go together.

My friends, every year at this time we turn our attention to a piece of this reality of walking side by side on one path, and we

talk about money. Specifically, we ask everyone who finds St. Mark's Cathedral to be a place of belonging, a place of connection, to make their financial commitment for the coming year in support of the common work we are about here.

We have some 1200 households who are connected to this community; about 500 of those make a financial commitment each year. What would it be if everyone in this community made their commitment—an authentic commitment from the resources they have been given in life, to sow the seeds of connection to this place just a little deeper. Every commitment, no matter the amount, matters, and when given in gratitude for the connections we enjoy, it changes us, the ones who give. Sharing our financial gifts is a tangible way of belonging.

As you walk the road with the Chosen One, have you gained from him courage for the journey? Have you found comfort in his love? Do you share together in his Spirit? Has his tenderness and mercy captured your heart?

If so, then share from that courage and comfort and tenderness and mercy, and

know that in doing so, lives are changed, the Church is changed, the world is changed, for it is God who is at work in the Church, in you and me, in this community to which we belong.

And for that may God's holy name be praised.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/art/true-belonging/>. And as cited in an [essay](#) by Liz Cooledge Jenkins

<sup>ii</sup> As cited in Jenkins' essay. Much of the exegetical theme is drawn from her fine essay on this passage.