

David W. Lloyd: Truly Belonging

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Truly Belonging

This past year life for Sharon and me has centered on family. Adam Childers proposed to Meredith in August of 2002, with a wedding planned for August 2003. Within two days after the proposal, Sharon was on the Internet, looking for a place to hold the reception, and I knew that her primary orientation in 2003 would be for the wedding. Then Erica found a job that really reflected what God was calling her life to: using her educational skills to help at-risk kids attending a poor neighborhood school in Charlottesville. A significant part our prayer life has centered on her learning the ropes as coordinator for the local "I Have a Dream" foundation, the youngest coordinator in the national program.

During the fall, the health of Sharon's father began to decline more precipitously. We noticed at Thanksgiving and Christmas that my father's memory was declining even more rapidly, and that my mother's aging was accelerating. Then, the day before my birthday, my mother fell and broke her hip or broke her hip and fell. Each of my sisters spent a day or so taking care of my father; then I took care of him for most of a week. We discovered why my mother was failing so – Dad just took lots of our energy for his care, and he was blithely unaware of just how much it took. We moved him to a very nice assisted living facility for respite care and my mother joined him. She recovered, but it was a relief to her to know that we did not expect them to go home again. Since then, she has

adjusted well, but he still wants to go home.

Later this year, one of my brother-in-laws had his thyroid removed, like my sister and their cat. However, the doctor also found a malignant tumor during the biopsy, and Bill has been enduring chemotherapy to ward off cancer, a disease that has claimed both of his parents. We helped Erica move to a new home this summer, then helped Meredith move to the apartment she and Adam now live in. Later this summer, the quality of care for Sharon's father was declining, so one of her sisters has taken him to live with her. Finally, Meredith and Adam's wedding came, and I had a weekend of joy. I really like my son-in-law and hope he will feel comfortable with us. The look on his face as Meredith climbed the two steps to join him at the front of the church told me that everything would be fine, and they both loudly and confidently exchanged vows.

Three Thursdays ago, Sharon and I had a candlelight dinner for our 32nd anniversary – we were going to do it anyway but Hurricane Isabel made it necessary. That Sunday we celebrated my father's 90th birthday with a surprise party so that many old friends came. Last Saturday Sharon and I helped my older sister and her husband take apart the shed my father had built 30 years ago next to his garden on a neighbor's vacant lot.

These are just the highlights! Why have I spent so much time talking about our family during recommitment season? It is because I belong to my parents, to my sisters and their husbands, to Sharon, Erica, Meredith and now Adam. Moreover, belonging is always a theme for recommitment.

There are two kinds of belonging: primary and secondary. A primary belonging is one you are born with – you entered it without a choice. A secondary belonging is one you choose to have, or in some cases, someone chooses you to have it. So belonging to a family is one of the two places of your primary belonging. The other primary belonging is to God. Marriage, your in-laws, your friendships, your closeness with co-workers

and your membership in Seekers Church – these are all secondary belongings.

I belong when I do not try to hold myself apart from the relationship – when I put my weight down there, when I invest time and energy in the relationship, when I give up my own claim to being an individual for the sake of being in relationship. I belong when I commit myself. The word “commit” derives from Latin words that mean, “To entrust.” To commit to a relationship is to give up part of my individuality, to surrender myself, trusting that the relationship will work.

Now surrender is not a word that we like very much. During the dark days of World War II, when England stood alone against Nazi Germany after the British retreat from France at Dunkirk, Sir Winston Churchill gave a famous speech. It ends with “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.” All of his words go back to the Old English Anglo Saxon words, except for the word “surrender,” which is of French origin. It was as if the concept of surrender was an unknown concept to the English. We Americans do not like the idea of surrender very much either. The other day I saw a window decal on a pickup truck that showed the American flag with the words, “These colors don’t run.” I thought to myself, “huh?” Has this person never heard of the U.S. abandonment of South Vietnam to avoid surrender to the North Vietnamese? Then there is the Confederate States’ surrender almost 140 years ago.

To belong to God as a Christian means to surrender my heart to Christ. To belong to Jesus is to accept his invitation to let Him enter my heart, and then I find that I enter His heart as well. In entering his heart, I enter his Body – and that is you and all Christians everywhere past, present, and future. Therefore, by belonging to Christ I belong to all of you. I do not belong to you all without belonging to Christ. I do not surrender to Seekers Church. I surrender to Christ, and the

Church comes with it. Knowing you and being known by you is how I get to know Christ, and be more deeply known by Christ. Surrendering to Christ, belonging to Christ more deeply is how I surrender to you more deeply.

This is hard stuff. To belong to Jesus is to be committed to what Jesus is committed. That means joy and freedom, but it also means pain and hardship, sacrifice, living in the narrow path. To commit to Christ, to enter the heart of God, is to open myself up to experiences I never thought I would have, to do things I never thought I would do, to be in relationship with people I never thought I would be around. Sometimes I do not like one or more of you very much and I am sure that sometimes one or more of you does not like me very much. However, it does not matter. We are part of the Body of Christ. To be the Body of Christ we belong to each other. It does not matter if the eye does not like the foot, if the nose does not like the armpit, or if the ears do not like the mouth. To be part of the Body is to be part of all of it.

Our theme this recommitment season is "doubt and dedication." Doubt is an act of our rational minds, its something that comes with thought. As Jeanne pointed out [two Sundays ago](#) and again [last Sunday](#), it is normal to have doubts about God and in God. Our experience leads us to question whether God will be there for us. Doubt may be either voluntary or involuntary. Nevertheless, dedication, commitment, is an act of will. It may or may not be rational. It may be emotional. However, it is always an act of will. It can even co-exist with doubt. I cannot be certain that I can swim across a river, but I can nevertheless still will myself, commit myself, dedicate myself, to doing swimming across. In fact, many acts of bravery and courage that we honor frequently happen because they decide to do something dangerous that has to be done even though they doubt that they will succeed. I can doubt in God or doubt that God will come through, but I can still commit to God, entrusting my life to God.

I used the word “dedicate” because it is another synonym for “commit.” Originally, the word meant to set apart. When I dedicate myself to something, I am setting myself apart from ordinary uses of time and space and resources. I am focused on that one thing; everything else is ignored. When I commit myself to Christ, when I dedicate myself to Him, I am forgoing my own choices, my own desires, to live solely in Him. As the membership commitment of the Church of the Saviour said, “I unreservedly and with abandon commit my life and destiny to Christ, promising to give Him a practical priority in all the affairs of life. I will seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.”

So we belong, we are committed, we are dedicated. That is not the end of the story. We can lose our belonging. When you end a friendship, you feel lonely until you find a new friend. When you change jobs, the closeness of your relationship with former co-workers withers away. Some people, who used to worship with us at Seekers, do not belong anymore. Some people in this room have had their marriage end. Some people have lived in a really awful family and are taken into foster care or are adopted. Other people lose their family at birth and are adopted into a new family. Moreover, some people lose their belonging to God.

We can lose our belonging in two ways. One is by consciously rejecting our belonging. I can break a friendship, change jobs or divorce my spouse. I know a number of people who decided as young adults to have nothing to do with their parents because their families made their life hell. I can end my belonging to God by saying that God really does not matter in my life.

I can also end my belonging by merely pretending to belong, by keeping my heart separate even if I go through a ritual of belonging. Many women agonize over men who cannot or will not commit themselves to a permanent relationship. I also worry about men – and women– who seem to commit to a permanent relationship, including marriage, but who really withhold

their heart from the relationship, so that eventually the relationship or marriage dies from a lack of love. I think that I was one of those people for quite some time. However, I really decided to put my weight down in my marriage, and I think Sharon would tell you she sees the difference. I hope she does.

The same thing can happen with our recommitment. We can really mean it, and surrender our heart to it, or we can keep part of our heart back, and our relationship to God can die from a lack of love. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that a Jewish scholar asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was. Jesus replied, to love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength. That is, to hold nothing back in loving God. I have had some annual recommitments to Seekers Church where consciously or unconsciously I really kept part of myself back. I may not have even known it at the time. Now I have put my weight down in Learners and Teachers, and I have put my weight down in Seekers Church as a whole.

In a few moments, we will be the Body of Christ in a circle, sharing his Body. Moreover, in a few weeks we will be invited to recommit to this Church. I invite you to reflect on committing yourself to Christ, not just to this Body. Reflect on dedicating yourself to him, unreservedly and with abandon, not just going through the motions. Truly belong.