

March 25th, 2012

Dear Friends



For some of us, 'a Sabbath days journey' is well beyond the church of our registered affiliation. Having been an itinerant for the last twenty-five years, you may forgive me for to not being sure where I 'belong'. While driving the 179 miles to the Leeds Church in Yorkshire, I had reason to reflect on this. I have not visited this church since October 22, 1966 the day following the Aberfan disaster, though it is the church where my parents were baptised, where they were inducted to Ministry and offered me as a infant to the Lord and His service more than sixty years ago. Is there a sense in which I could claim belonging, a special relationship? What does it really mean to 'belong'?

The question underlies the uncertainty many experience in new, transient and diverse communities. Do we have a response to those who feel disoriented? Is it not critical to the pathway to and through our faith community.

Having spent a significant portion of my life as a visitor in the land of others, I relish the experience of being a Yorkshire man in Yorkshire, speaking like a Yorkshireman, celebrating their simple, earthy no-nonsense approach to life, even though they presume me foreign. However irrational, birthright does seem to render a sense of belonging.

Some of the members in Leeds were surprised to find me interrupting their 'Mukiwa' gossip, curious to learn that I had been cultured on the same soil as they, travelled the same roads, entered the same villages, conscious of former conflicts and tensions. Over time belonging evolves through shared history and culture.

To keep balance, I was obliged to acknowledge that my service and survival owes much to having been adopted by constituents with Caribbean heritage. There are many relationships that work better when we offer each other a sense of belonging.

In our ministry we have debated much the dynamic relationship between 'belonging', 'behaving' and 'believing' in our 'becoming'. Some hold that acceptance is contingent on conceptual belief and conforming behaviour. Others argue that personal acceptance should be unconditional, a prerequisite the development of understanding and habits. In practice, the process is likely to be indescribably chaotic since it is by 'beholding' that we are changed.

At face value 'belonging' seems to come from birth, culture and adoption. Were this the total picture, I could achieve it by hanging around local markets or football clubs and conform to some point of acceptance. However, the question is not so much where I belong, but to whom I belong. Our fellowship and sense of belonging is founded on purchase. We are bought at a price, benevolently treasured by the one who sacrificed his life for our frustrating circumstance. So there it is, belonging presupposes sacrifice.

Thank you for your efforts to welcome the 'unbelonging' to their birthright among the 'whosoever' who believe in the God who sent his Son.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victor." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Victor