



BELONG. BELOVED . BLESSED . BRAVE

FLOWER MOUND UMC
WINTER DEVOTIONAL

2021

Becoming

BELONG . BELOVED . BLESSED . BRAVE

FROM BEING TO BECOMING

ONGOING CREATION

"In the beginning..." are the first words of the Scripture, reminding us that God creates through time. Counted in days, the earth which was once a formless void takes shape, offers energy, and reveals beauty through time. This is the nature of creation, what is being, is always becoming. The present becomes the future.

It has been hard to have the long view in 2020, and not become caught in the whirlwind of change, grief and fears that have emerged amidst a flood of emotions. But perhaps we can take a moment to reflect on all that is passed, and ask not what we are feeling, but how is God creating? For God is always in the business of creating and we are not the same after what we have been through - individually, and collectively.

Challenge can make us or break us. How we adapt to change shares a lot about our perspective for the future. If we only return to what life was pre-pandemic, we have learned little. But if we can become something new and better from what we have learned in the process, then we are in the God-business. That is - the business of becoming a new creation. As ones made in the image of God, we are a work continually in progress, being formed and reformed by prayer, study, experiences, and relationships. In the process of knowing our value to God and one another more deeply, each day offers the possibility of something new - reforming us into a holy image - this is the process known as sanctification in the Wesleyan tradition.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, asked questions of his small groups who met weekly. The purpose of these questions was to help them become more attentive to God's work creating among them in the daily work of the world. Some of the questions in this devotional are designed to offer you those same opportunities and allow us as the body of Christ to reveal a new creation. As we continue to seek God through our self-reflection in private devotion, we will become a new creation.

Consider:

Becoming implies growth, movement and direction.

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME SOMETHING NEW IN THIS PANDEMIC?

God's face is most visible when we can not see what direction to go.

WHAT CHALLENGE HAVE YOU FACED THAT REQUIRED YOU TO RELY ON GOD?

Creativity is the source of our Creative God.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO CONNECT WITH THE CREATIVITY OF GOD?

SO IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, THERE IS A NEW CREATION: EVERYTHING OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; SEE, EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Belong

BECOMING KNOWN



To whom do you belong?

We know the answer is God, as children of the Divine One.

But our lives often do not reflect this truth. Belonging starts with knowing we are important and valued, that our lives make a difference and that we have a place where we can be genuine and authentic. But we as humans search for belonging in all kinds of places. We place our identity in our jobs, our spouses, our achievements for a sense of security and value. The rise of depression, anxiety, divorce and addiction in this pandemic have reminded us that belonging is sought in many forms, and when it is questioned or doubted, there are ramifications.

Yet our identity in God assures us we always belong. Our Divine Parent, knows us completely, warts and all! No matter where we have come from, what we have done or who we think we are, first and foremost belong to God. We have been known since we were created in our mother's womb and in that knowing, we are fully identified. God is active and engaged in our lives before we are even aware - this is called prevenient grace.

When seeking to belong, the body of Christ is the place where every person's identity is important and valued. To belong means someone understands you. To belong means someone cares enough to know you. To belong means that you are a part of something larger than just yourself. To belong means you can genuinely and authentically be who God has created you to be. To belong means that you can honor and care for others gracefully, because you are secure in your own identity.

Ephesians 1:5 assures us: "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure." Imagine the joy that a parent has in seeing their child grow and develop, or even when they see them returning home! This is the kind of happiness God has by saying "You belong to me." The joy we know in belonging to God offers us the assurance that we have someone who loves us unconditionally!

Coming into the presence of God in worship is the place of belonging - where you can be authentic and genuine, and know that you are valued and cherished. Your Heavenly Parent delights in your presence in praise and worship. This desire to be in a relationship with you is evident in the Triune God and shows that God will go through all of creation to ensure you know you belong. As Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer belong to one another, so do you belong in a relationship with the Divine One. Enjoy the presence of God, where you always belong!

Consider:

The places we feel belonging, may not be the places we truly belong.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLACES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU BELONG ?

You belong to God.

**HOW DOES THIS ASSURANCE GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE?
HOW DOES IT CHALLENGE YOU?**

Every person belongs to God.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO ENSURE EVERY PERSON KNOWS THEY BELONG TO GOD?

Beloved

BECOMING LOVED

"This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

These are the words of God, in the moment Jesus is baptized.

Oh, how we too, long to hear of our belovedness to God! Knowing that we are accepted and embraced by an all knowing God offers assurance, peace, and a relationship unlike any on earth. For this love is unconditional love, stemming from being known by God. God knows our deepest faults and also our most abundant hearts. God loves us despite ourselves and because of ourselves. This is the amazing grace that we experience in baptism.

Love in our human relationships is often conditional - it is based on doing, saying, or being the "right" person, with the determination of what that correctness means to another individual. But God's love does not have pre-cursors or even conditions. In fact, God's love is so forgiving and merciful that it has no human capability of defining its magnitude. Yet, allowing yourself to be loved is a matter of trust and vulnerability. When you open your life and self up to love, you give up control. When you allow for the presence and identity of Christ to become a part of your identity you truly understand the act of sacrificial love. When you allow yourself to become loved by God, you experience justifying grace.

So many people doubt if they have passed the point of God's ability to forgive or their ability to forgive themselves. But God's love is knowing our true hearts and our holy selves. This is the image in which we are created and continually recreated in the act of God's abundant and graceful love.

As we accept our own belovedness, we also begin to recognize the belovedness of others. In allowing ourselves to be forgiven, we become more forgiving. In giving up control before God, we give up trying to control others. Belovedness becomes not just who we experience God to be, but also the community we become. A beloved community means that we live into our baptismal vows to resist sin, evil and injustice in the many forms they present themselves and we follow Jesus in the ways of love in our daily living. We become beloved collectively the more we love as God loves us.



Consider:

With you, God is well pleased.

**IN ALL YOUR BROKENNESS
AND IN ALL YOUR MISTAKES
IN ALL OF YOUR HOLINESS
IN ALL OF YOUR GOODNESS
GOD LOVES YOU.**

Prayer is a way of communicating with God and experiencing belovedness.

**ARE YOUR PRAYERS AN
EXPERIENCE OF RECEIVING
AND GIVING LOVE?**

Imagine the community where all know they are beloved.

**HOW ARE YOU PARTICIPATING
IN THE BELOVED COMMUNITY?**

**SEE
WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN TO US, THAT WE
SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD;
AND SO WE ARE.**

1 JOHN 3:1



Blessed

BECOMING SIGNIFICANT

You've heard the phrase so many times: "#Blessed." But what does it mean?
Are we blessed because our circumstances provide for our needs?
Are we blessed because we feel comfortable and secure?
Are we blessed because our relationships are stable?
Or are we blessed to be a blessing?

Perhaps blessedness is how God views us as belonging to God and beloved by God. Jesus teaches in Matthew 6 that those who are poor and those who mourn are blessed. This certainly does not seem like the kind of blessing we understand in this world. But blessing can come even in the worst of times, because of God's presence telling us that we belong and are beloved. Jesus knows our deepest pains and loneliness, and all the fears that are in the world. This is the blessing of God's incarnate presence with us.

God's desire to bless us is so great, that God became one of us through Jesus! It is Jesus' life of healing and hope that teaches us how to live as well. For we find blessings are meant to be shared. From the ways Jesus listened, taught, shared and included, we too learn what it means to give of ourselves as a blessing to others.

The Holy Spirit empowers us with unique talents, perspectives and spiritual gifts to follow Jesus as disciples. When we consider that our lives are not our own, but given by God as a gift to share, our priorities shift. Sometimes we might think our careers or family define our becoming. But God's blessing is bigger than even the most important ways in which we spend our lives. The truth is, we become something new, every time we share a part of ourselves with someone else. As we bless others, they too bless us, offering a constant sense of re-creation.

How might we listen and lean into the Holy Spirit to guide and equip us to understand our gifts, talents, and time as a blessing? How might we value one another by honoring the blessing we are all becoming.

Consider:

Blessed is how God views us as belonging and beloved to God.

WHAT DOES BECOMING BLESSED MEAN TO YOU?

Blessing is more than a state of mind,
Blessing is a continuum of being.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN A PRESENCE OF BLESSING LATELY?

The Holy Spirit has gifted each of us.

WHAT TALENTS, PERSPECTIVES AND GIFTS DO YOU HAVE THAT ARE A BLESSING?

GOD IS ABLE TO BLESS YOU ABUNDANTLY, SO THAT IN ALL THINGS AT ALL TIMES, HAVING ALL THAT YOU NEED, YOU WILL ABUND IN EVERY GOOD WORK.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:9

Brave

BECOMING THE KINGDOM

Bravery is not about fighting a battle to win.
Bravery is not about proving a point to be right.
Bravery is not even about standing up for yourself.
Bravery is sharing whole-heartedly of your entire being so that the kingdom of God may reign on earth.



The only way to be brave in this world is to be fully committed to God's priorities and purpose. Without this level of commitment, bravery becomes too self-focused and our courage stems only from our own resources. When bravery's source is God's power, then our resources are unlimited. Then, sharing bravely is not about us, but rather about how we are part of a larger picture offering the hope and healing of Christ.

As we look to Scripture we may find examples of bravery to which we can relate:

- Ruth commits to caring for the widowed Naomi by traveling with her to a foreign land and providing for her well being.
- Jeremiah continually speaks God's word aloud despite his feelings of self-doubt and depression.
- Peter recommits to spreading the good news of Jesus even after he has betrayed him three times.
- Paul persists in growing the church, despite the many hardships and sacrifices it requires.

How might we too be brave in our discipleship? We can be brave in offering joy to the world, sharing a perspective beyond a situation that may seem bleak. We can be brave in acts of hope offering relief from poverty, oppression and illness, alongside persons who are suffering. We can be brave in sharing love through forgiving and working towards reconciliation when others are bitter and resentful. We can be brave in speaking peace through our writings when only divisiveness and partisanship exist.

Sometimes our acts of bravery might be viewed as idealistic, but our perspective is about the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of this world. In bravery, we no longer live for ourselves, but we offer ourselves fully to following Jesus Christ in constant transformation and sacrificial offering. How would your life look different if you started following Jesus with bravery?

Would courage require you to sacrifice or give up something? Or would you need to add a measure of strength to not be afraid? Perhaps the bravery you need can come from belonging to a God who loves you unconditionally and has given you everything you need to be who you are called to become.

Consider:

Bravery is being a part of the kingdom of God.

HOW DOES THE KINGDOM OF GOD LOOK DIFFERENT THAN THIS WORLD?

The only way to be brave is to be fully committed to God's priorities and purpose.

WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES NOW?

HOW ARE THOSE DIFFERENT FROM GOD'S PRIORITIES FOR YOU?

Bravery requires us to no longer live for ourselves, but for following Jesus in constant transformation.

HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE LOOK DIFFERENT IF YOU FOLLOWED JESUS WITH BRAVERY?

Becoming

SCRIPTURES

Brave

Joshua 1:9
2 Chronicles 15:7
Ruth 1:16
Mark 14:60-62
Luke 8:41-48

Belong

Exodus 20:17
Isaiah 43:1
Psalm 100:3
Matthew 19:14
John 15:19
1 Corinthians 3:21-23

Blessed

Genesis 1:22-28
1 Kings 8:56-58
Psalm 66:20
Proverbs 22:9
Matthew 5:3-11
Luke 1:45-48
Romans 4:7-9

Beloved

Matthew 12:18
1 Corinthians 15:58
Ephesians 4:31-5:1
Colossians 3:12-15
1 Thessalonians 5:14-19



A Prayer of Becoming

God of all Creation,
You are making me new every day and for this, I thank you and praise you.
May I let myself belong to you and no one else so that my identity is in you alone.
May I hear you call me beloved, so I know I am not alone.
May your Holy Spirit pour out upon me with gifts and graces to bless those you want
me to serve.
May you empower us with bravery for acts of kindness, mercy, and sacrifice in the
world.

Notes

FOR BECOMING

Five words I use to describe "Belonging" are:

God calls me 'Beloved' because:

God has blessed me with the gifts of:

I can be brave by: