

Being re-membered—belonging
Psalm 1:1-6

In this opening Psalm, the writer is painting a contrast between sinners and the righteous. He's using the vocabulary of the court room, distinguishing between those who are guilty and those who have been acquitted. We could use other vocabulary: those who are bound and those who are liberated; those who see and those who are blind; those who are forgiven, and those who are guilty.

Standing in the Resurrection Garden, we see that everyone is already forgiven. The distinction then in Psalm 1 is about living our lives *knowing* that we've been forgiven, acquitted. When we know, in our bodies and beings, in our minds and spirits, that we've been released from our guilt, then we're able to stand in the light of God's love. We're free to stand, letting God's face and love and grace shine on us and in us. And we know, all the way to our bones and our toes, we know that we're God's beloved.

Of course, there isn't a straight or clear line between sinners and the righteous. We're all righteous sinners! Each of us have been given new eyes in the Resurrection Garden *and* we have blind spots. Each of us has experienced the liberation and healing of forgiveness and acquittal *and* each of us are bound in one way or another by pain and guilt. Each of us gets lost from time to time, losing sight of Jesus and wandering away from the Resurrection Garden.

The psalmist is using spatial images to describe the nuances between living as one who is beloved and as one who is guilty. "Don't *walk in* the counsel of the guilty. Don't *stand on the road* of sinners. Don't *sit in* distain." It's about where you put your body. It's about the ecosystem you're part of. The poet also uses the image of chaff, of ones who are easily swayed and blown about by whatever wind that blowing. With these images, we have a sense of bodies being ungrounded...without a place...not belonging.

In contrast to this image of wandering about, insecure, and separate...we see trees. Trees that have been planted. Trees that have roots growing into the earth...roots reaching to water. Trees that are grounded...that have a place...trees that belong. *This* is an image of those who know they are beloved of God...who know they have been acquitted...who know that no matter what—no matter what circumstances, or, no matter what sinful thing they do—they will eternally *belong* to God and to life.

There's a way in which we know this. Intellectually we know it. Our minds know it as a fact. But for many of us, that knowing never reaches our hearts and muscles and blood and bones. We *don't* know it in our bodies and beings. *Unconsciously* we live as though we're separate...not only separate from God, but separate from each other. We live as ones banished from the Garden...longing for the mythic Eden...forgetting that with our baptism we've been born into the very real Resurrection Garden of the Living God.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of bad theology out there that teaches us to forget our belonging in the Resurrection Garden. My guess is that many of us...most of us?...we know what it is to feel like we don't belong. The messages we experience in our bodies and beings is that we don't belong to particular places or to particular people or particular groups of people. It always looks like *others* belong...but *I* don't. Living as though we don't belong has us walking and standing and sitting in places that aren't good for us. In fact, they're harmful.

When we forget that we belong, we live with the pain and isolation of being dis-membered from each other and from the body of creation. When we forget that we belong, we don't see the ways that our lives are in relationship with the body of creation. When we forget that we belong, we live in fear, distrusting others and life because we think we're on our own. It's lonely when we don't belong.

But, dear Fellowship of Hope, you...each of you...has been planted in the Resurrection Garden. Belonging is the truth of who we are, as humans and as creatures. The truth is that we belong to each other. And we belong to creation.

This is the truth that Jesus not only taught, but that he healed people into. Wherever he went, he gathered those who didn't belong and invariably, at the other side of the encounter, the person was changed...healed...made whole...as they experienced *belonging*. Encounters with Jesus reminded people that they were loved, forgiven...that they belonged. Jesus remembered people into belonging. After an encounter with Jesus, people remembered that they belonged to God...that they belonged to themselves...and they belonged to each other.

Belonging is a practice. It's an act of faith.

Watching Jesus is a good way to practice belonging to each other. Watching trees, that's also a really good way to *see* what it means to belong to each other.

We live in a context where we possess and own things. This or that *belongs* to me. The belonging that the psalmist and Jesus and the trees are teaching us has nothing to do with owning...with possessing for ourselves; rather, it has everything to do with sharing and reciprocity and mutuality, with interdependence and inter-being, with relationships and ecosystems.

We belong to creation. We don't own it and it doesn't own us. But we are *part of* creation. We are part of each other. Our relationships with each other and with creation are always reciprocal and interconnected. A tree is planted into the ground. Its roots are growing into the soil. The tree's life depends on soil and water and sun. The tree lives because the soil gives itself for food. As the tree grows, it in turn gives away its acorns so that squirrels and other creatures can eat and live. The tree releases its leaves, returning life to soil. It offers

shade and shelter to any creature that comes to it. It gives its life so we human have houses and furniture.

Do you see it? The tree belongs. It belongs to creation and to the ecosystem and community it is part of. Its life depends on the community of creation around it and it, and in turn, the community receives life from the tree.

This is what it looks like to belong. When we trust our belonging...when we trust that we're beloved and forgiven...when we trust that we are always at home in the Resurrection Garden...then we are free to flourish and thrive. To flourish and thrive, we accept with gratitude the gifts of the oaks, the gifts of soil and water, all the gifts of earth that feed us so that we can be healthy and whole. When we are flourishing, we in turn share our fruit and our lives with those in our ecosystem, with those in our particular place in God's Resurrection Garden.

May we trust that Creator God has planted us in this place, in this time.

May we learn to know in our bodies and beings that we are loved, that we have been acquitted, that we belong.

And may we practice belonging—belonging to each other, belonging to creation, belonging in the Resurrection Garden of the Living God.