

## A True Sense of Belonging

John 10:1-16 (New International Version)

*“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.*

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. <sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*

## Introduction

This morning, we are going to focus on youth and their need: sense of belonging. Although everyone needs the sense of belonging, today’s youth could use it the most. I offer them Christ as the true sense of belonging.

Years ago, Amy, one of the youths in my first parish, wrote in the newspaper column as follows: “One of the worst problems faced by teens today is loneliness. I see so many kids from my school walking around looking at the ground, or sitting alone in the lunchroom, because they have no one to walk or talk with. Too many teens die each year because they were so lonely that they didn’t think there was a reason to live any longer” (“Teens and Loneliness,” Amy Treloar, Lansing State Journal, 1992).

Tony Campolo (well-known speaker and author) also shared the same concern for youth in America. He said, “One word characterizes today’s high school. **‘Apathy’**- there’s

*deadness among them. Lack of emotion, guilty, scared, withdrawn, don't know what to do, no sense of belonging"* (Tape, *Growing up in America*).

Did you hear their common concern for today's youth? *Loneliness, apathy, withdrawn, don't know what to do, and no sense of belonging.* They are isolated. They are lonely. They are scared. To alleviate the feelings of loneliness, they look for friendship everywhere. That's perhaps why teens are so crazy about social media. *YouTube, Snapchat, Tiktok, Instagram...*

They struggle with their identity (*who am I*), don't they? They search for meaning and purpose to which they can pledge their loyalty and commitment (*what/whom should I live/die for*). The world offers them a solution: '*be whatever you want to be.*' But we all know that's not the solution for their struggle.

Youth need God. They need Christ who holds the answer in His hands for such a time as this. Christ offers them a true identity. He gives them a true sense of belonging, too. He says, "I died for you because I love you. You belong to Me. No one messes with Me on you. Your loneliness ends right here. In Me, you will find rest. In Me, you will find purpose. In Me, you will find peace. In Me, you will find security. With Me, your search for meaning ends. I am the One for whom you live and die. Come to Me." Christ invites.

## **Content**

### **You Are Mine**

Look at verses 14-15 in today's text. Jesus says, "*I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know me.*" He's saying to you, "I know you. I am your shepherd. You are mine. I have chosen you. I have called you even before you were conceived in your mother's womb. You belong to Me." That claim is real, authentic, and secure for eternity. Can you say 'Amen' to His claim? Will you accept His invitation to be His? Forever?! I have.

By the way, on what basis does Christ make such an exclusive claim that you belong to Him? Because He bought you outright with His own blood. He paid the wages of your sins through His own death. It may sound basic or even strange to you, but it is crucial for you to understand this truth once and for all with no doubt.

Before we believed in Christ, and before we heard about what Christ has done for us, we were sinners living in darkness. We didn't know God and we were outsiders of salvation. We were enslaved to our enemy Satan and lived under the power of sin and death.

However, when Christ came, He laid down His life as a ransom for us. Through repentance, our sins were forgiven in His name, and we crossed over from death to life (John 5:24), from slavery to freedom. He bought us, the slaves to sin, by paying the wages of our sin. On the cross, the payment was fully made, the deal was sealed, and from then on, He declared that we are no longer under the power of sin and death. We are His own and forever His.

Let me illustrate my point. Suppose you went to a store and bought a pair of shoes. You paid \$50.00 for the shoes. As soon as the payment is made, you can claim, and everyone knows it too, that the pair is yours. A few minutes before, the shoes belonged to the store owner. But now with the full payment made, the ownership of the shoes is transferred from the store to you. In the same way, as soon as the payment for your sins was completed through His death, Jesus claims that you are His own. And you are no longer under the power of your enemy Satan. That's the ownership. That's the true sense of belonging. You belong to Christ.

### **I Know You by Name**

Once you become His, Christ treats you like His brother/sister. He loves you in a very special way, too, a royal way. You now are a member of God's family. Christ knows you very well, more than you do about yourself. For instance, He knows you and calls you by name. Look at verse 3. *"...He **calls his own sheep by name** and leads them out."* He remembers you **by name**! Do you understand how blessed you are to be recognized by Jesus personally?

Some years ago, I got a letter from then President George W. Bush. The letter began with the phrase, *"Dear community leader,..."* Mind you that I wasn't the only one who received that letter. In fact, the letter was sent out to thousands of pastors to solicit more active involvement of churches for the needy. But the mere fact that I got a letter from the president of the USA made me feel pretty good about myself. I was elated. Then, I further thought to myself, "Wouldn't it have been far more exciting and wonderful, if he had written me a personal letter, calling me by name?" How much more exciting and honorable it is, folks, when the King of kings and the Lord of lords recognizes you by name?

### **Come Follow Me**

With such a name recognition comes along divine expectations. Remember you belong to Christ? Remember you are a prized possession of Christ? That means, Christ holds you up high to God's own expectations. Nothing more, nothing less. For instance, Christ commands, "If anyone comes after Me, let him deny himself, take up his own cross, and follow Me." To deny yourself means to put Christ first, others second, and yourself last.

It means to love and serve others in the name of Jesus. To take up your cross means to be prepared for a public disgrace for Jesus' sake. It means the world will make fun of you due to your faith. It also means willingness to go against the flow for the sake of God's kingdom. It means to be ready to die for Christ and His name.

### **Too Exacting of a Command?**

You may think it impossible to live up to such an exacting command. You may dislike or even reject Christ's command because it sounds too radical or too negative to your taste. Yet don't forget who Christ is to you. He is your Lord and Savior. He is more than just a friend. Furthermore, it is a command. His command is far weightier than mere suggestions. After all, don't you think Christ knows what He is asking from you? In other words, He wouldn't waste His time, commanding you to do something impossible nor non-essential for your heaven-bound journey, would He? He knows not only that you can do it, but also, that you would benefit from keeping His command.

What should the Church offer to today's youth? Christ. And His biblical truths and standards. Nothing more, nothing less. Let us hold our youth up to the Christ's expectations so that they too may give their life to Christ in full and live for the kingdom of God. By the way, if you believe the Church is asking too much from the youth, think again. Listen to Mr. Campolo: *"If these generations of teenagers lost of the Church, it will not because we demanded too much of them, but it will be because we did not demand enough of them (op.cit.)."*

### **Conclusion**

Let me conclude my sermon with a story of a young woman who met Christ, found the true sense of belonging, and devoted her life to Christ's cause.

Tony Campolo writes: *"I met Nancy because she was a guest on a radio show that I host on WZZD in Philadelphia. Nancy is crippled and confined to a wheelchair, yet she has developed a unique ministry to hurting and lonely people of the city. It is beautiful in its simplicity. She runs ads in the personal section of the newspaper that read: if you are lonely or have a problem call me. I am in a wheelchair and seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. Just call. I'd love to talk."*

*The results are astounding. Each week at least thirty calls come in. She spends her days comforting and counseling people. She has become someone to lean on for hundreds of people with problems. When I asked Nancy how she became crippled, she answered, "By trying to*

*commit suicide.” I was stunned. She went on to explain, “I was living alone. I had no friends. I hated my job, and I was constantly depressed. I decided to jump from the window of my apartment, but instead of being killed, I ended up in the hospital paralyzed from my waist down. The second night I was in the hospital, Jesus appeared to me and told me that I’d had a healthy body and a crippled soul but from then on I would have a crippled body and a healthy soul. I gave my life to Christ right there and then.*

*“When I got out of the hospital, I tried to think of how a woman like me in a wheelchair could do some good, and I came up with the idea of putting the ad in the newspaper. And the rest, as they say, is all history.” (p. 87-88, Wake up America!, Tony Campolo). Belong to Christ, and you will find everything you need.*

Let us pray.