

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

**Teaching: Carlon Tschetter**  
**Series: People in Community**  
**Message: Made to Belong**

**Transcribed Message**  
**August 30, 2020**  
**Ephesians 2:11-22**

In the 1980s, there was a popular TV sitcom. It was a show that had to me a kind of hauntingly truthful and yet sad theme song. It was called Cheers. It took place in Boston. The gathering place of a group of people was in Sam's bar. There actually is a place in Boston called Cheers. This group of people that gathered I hope not every day, but it seemed like every day. It was a group of people that apart from that setting and that time would have been not terribly likely to be together and spend a lot of time together. It was that innate need that all of them had to belong and to be a part of something and to have some sense of community that seemed to bring them together. I said those words to me were kind of hauntingly truthful and sad at the same time. You remember what they were. "Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same. You want to be where everybody knows your name." I suppose to me those lyrics are haunting because not only are they truthful, they speak to the human condition. They speak to what all of us find deep inside, this God-given desire and need to connect and to be in community and belong somewhere to something.

But they also to me were always sad because I thought from the perspective of a pastor how many of those people or people like that came to a place like this and never found what they were looking for, never found a place to belong, never found a community of people to connect with, to go deeper with, to share life with, and ended up in the other place looking for community in a place like we saw in Cheers. We're taking a short break from our study in Romans. We're stepping into this fall kickoff that we do every year. We're looking at People in Community. We've looked at People of the Book, People of the Spirit, People on a Mission, and now this fall looking at People in Community.

I want to take just a couple minutes and review some fundamentals of Covenant Community Church. Just a couple of things that I want to remind you of again. Our vision. Our vision at Covenant is that we would know God, that we would love others, and we would live out the gospel. To know God simply means we want to grow in our walk with God. We want to grow deeper in our walk with God. We want to grow deeper in our understanding of this Word and this truth that God has promised to use and to guide our life, to be equipped by this Word. We want to love others. We want to love others in a way that is both deep and wide. You can't go deep with a whole lot of people but you can go deep with a smaller group. You can certainly go wide in the sense that every time that we're together we are looking out for others to help them connect and help them become a part of and have a sense of belonging and community. We can do both as the people of God. We want to be loving others. Of course we want to live out this gospel. That's what Paul says in our theme verse in Romans. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God to salvation. It is the only message that we have for this world and its desperate state of affairs that is going to transform and change the lives of people for all of eternity. So we want to know God, love others and live the gospel.

Our mandate in that sense then is that we want to be a church that is making disciples who are in turn making disciples. It doesn't just stop at making disciples. We want to be about the work and the mandate of making disciples who make disciples. So when I think of what that might look like you have to come. You have to connect. You have to belong. There has to be some connections that take place that cause you to think you belong in this setting together. Then as you do that, you grow. As you grow, you begin to understand this mandate that God has given to us which is not just to take all this good stuff in but it's to be a part of passing it on. It's disciples who make disciples that we are to be about the business of doing.

Why do we do it? Our goal is for the glory of God. Our goal is the glory of God. Our very existence as a church and as individuals is to do everything for the glory of God. That's what Paul says in more than one place. Whatever you do, whether you're eating or sleeping, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. That is a quick overview of what we want to be about as the people of Covenant.

So this morning. Made to belong. The need and the desire I think is placed by God in all of our hearts. This need and desire to belong is a fundamentally human one that God has placed in every one of our souls. God has designed and He's desiring that the church be a part of that place where we find that need met.

Let's look this morning at the importance of belonging. I'd like to start off and give you a quick look at the storyline of the Bible and how this idea of belonging and being part of community is really a part of the storyline of the Bible. For instance, one of the most fundamental doctrines of our Christian faith is that we are Trinitarian. If you're Orthodox in your Christian faith you're a Trinitarian. That means you believe in the Trinity. You believe that there is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. In this beautiful, mysterious picture that we have of belonging and community within the Godhead – we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in that sense, sharing together this journey, this life, this existence. They love and care and interact together. There's independence and dependency within the Godhead. You see it in creation as they each have their part. You see it in redemption as they each have their part. So we have this beautiful picture right within our own understanding of the very basic concept of God in Scripture.

We see in one of the very first statements in the Bible in which God said something to somebody named Adam. In Genesis 2:18 God said it's not good for you to be alone. Adam looked around and said, who me? Are you talking to me? That's where that started, guys. Who me? You talking to me? There was only one person. It was Adam and God said after He had created all of this beautiful, creative work He looked at Adam and said it's not good that you're alone. Sin hadn't even entered the world yet, but there was something lacking in this man's life. We know that God created marriage, this institution between a man and a woman. He tells us in the end of that chapter that He did that so they would come together as one, that they would experience oneness and unity and community. Even within the concept of marriage God gives us this picture.

Go all the way through to the final book of the Bible, the next to the last chapter. Listen to Revelation chapter 21 and verse 3: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people." Wow. That's incredible, isn't it? Behold, the dwelling place of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the

magnificence, the majesty of the Godhead. John says He is going to have His dwelling place with man and He will dwell with them. They will be His people. I would just say to you that belonging is all the way through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Belonging is all through the Bible. That's why Augustine said, "You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

Here's the other thing, the other part of the storyline of the Bible. All through the storyline of the Bible there is a parallel story that's running. The parallel story that's running is lost humanity trying to find all kinds of ways to fill that need of belonging and that sense for community but doing so in all of the wrong places and all the wrong ways. You see both of those running together all through Scripture. Let's look then at why that is. Why is there that other storyline that runs all through the Bible? It is given to us in the book of Ephesians, the second chapter. We're called out of spiritual brokenness. We're called out of spiritual brokenness. Notice again in verse 11 we're called from being outside of the gospel. Verse 11 "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands." He tells us in order to appreciate what we have, we have to look at what we didn't have before this. In order to belong, we are to remember. He starts off verse 11 "therefore remember..." He wants us to think back on what he has just described previous to this. He wants us to look back at who we were.

The church at Ephesus, remember this is the same church that we were in last week when we were in 1 Timothy. This is the same group. This is like five years earlier than 1 Timothy. Paul writes this letter of Ephesians to these believers in Ephesus. As he does that, he is writing to a group of people who are largely Gentile in their demographic make-up. When the early church started in Jerusalem it was almost 100% Jewish. God raised up the church out of the community of those of the Old Covenant. The Jerusalem church was almost entirely in its beginning Jewish. The gospel spread throughout the world and Gentiles began to respond. The church became a mixed group of people – Jews and Gentiles. That is as part of what he's dealing with in this second chapter. This division that they were experiencing was based on their ethnicity. He steps into that and he says in order to be able to come together and belong, to be able to have community, you need to just think again and reflect a little bit on who you were and what you were.

You were outsiders. That is the whole idea of the word “uncircumcision”. You could just substitute the word “outsiders”. You did not belong to the spiritual community, the covenant community. You were outside of that.

Here's the thing that we should remember. That's where we all started. That's where we all were. We were all on the outside. There might be somebody here this morning, might be somebody listening on livestream who is on the outside. You have not yet understood or embraced or maybe even heard the gospel. Paul's first admonition to us is take a look at where you are. Remember what you were when you were on the outside of the gospel. Everybody starts there and we want everybody to come to the point where they understand that gospel.

The second thing he says is we're not only called from outside but we're called from belonging to the world. Look again at verse 12. “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Look at that 12<sup>th</sup> verse and you'll see five statements there that are incredibly powerful descriptions of who we were. We were separated from Christ. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. We were strangers to this covenant of promise. We had no hope. We were without God in the world. It reminds me a lot of where we were in Romans. It has a familiar ring to it as Paul describes in Romans 1 our lost condition, that we're outside of the gospel, apart from Christ. He does the same thing here in Ephesians. We are without hope. We are without God.

Now two things that aren't in the outline. I want you to realize that this word “remember” that he uses two times is the only verb in this whole set of verses. It's an imperative. It's a command. It's the focal point of what he's pointing to here. He's really serious about our remembering what it is that we were before Christ. Our tendency is to forget what we were. Our tendency is to forget where we were. This description that Paul gives us – it's easy to forget that that was our condition and that was our state. He wants us to remember. Then again I just emphasize the fact everybody starts here. Our trouble in that sense is we're all the same. Just like the song says. You want to go where everybody knows your name. You want to go where everybody is on an even playing field. That's what the Bible teaches. Apart from Christ, the gospel comes to

people who are all in that same condition without God, without hope. Every one of us needs somebody from outside of ourselves to come and rescue us. That of course is none other than the Lord Jesus.

Next point. We're called into union with Christ. We're called into union with Christ. Verse 13 "But now in Christ Jesus you once who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." We've literally switched places. We were on the outside, and now we're on the inside. We were without hope, and now we have hope. We were without Christ, now we have Christ. He is just showing us this picture here and he starts off again look at verse 13 "but now." But now. This strong contrast is beautiful. Beautiful contrast that he gives us right at the beginning of this new place at verse 13. It takes me again back to the book of Romans. So fresh. When we went through that whole section of Romans 1, Romans 2, we finally got to Romans 3. Remember that day? We all celebrated and rejoiced when we came to verse 21. But now the righteousness of God has been manifest. So we walked through all of that part of Romans in which we were being reminded of our lost condition apart from Christ. Then the beautiful contrast in verse 21 – but now the righteousness of God. It is the same thing that you have in Ephesians. But now the gospel has come. He'll say the same thing in Romans 5:8 when he talks about the fact that we were enemies of God. But now something has happened. Someone has rightly observed that some of the greatest truths of the Bible come after the phrase "but now". Or "but God" as He breaks in and He changes radically the direction of our life.

What does He do for us? We have this beautiful contrast and why is it such a beautiful contrast? Because secondly, we are now given a new identity. We're given a new identity. This terminology that he uses here is that we are now in Christ. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. That little phrase "in Christ" says to us that as God sees us, He sees us the way He sees Christ. He views you the way He views His Son. He's ready to treat you just the way He treats Jesus. It is an amazing picture that we have here. It is one of the great truths of the New Testament. It's the sum total in many ways of all of our salvation experience. To be in Christ is to be saved, and to be united with Christ is to be in union with Him. On the back table in the foyer, I've put a list of 36 things that happen at the

moment that we trust Christ as Savior. Grab one of those and stick it in your Bible. The next time you begin to doubt what God is doing in your life or as you begin to wonder how it is that He views you, just take that paper out of your Bible and begin to read back to yourself 36 things that explain what happened to you when you embraced that gospel and you moved from being without hope and without Christ to coming to understand Jesus as your Savior. So verse 13, we've been brought near. We're no longer estranged from God. We have peace with God. Verse 14.

Verse 15. We have unity with others. When we realize our union with Christ, we not only belong to Christ, but because of that we belong to each other. If you share in that hope of the gospel, then you've stepped into that community of God's people. We belong to Jesus. We belong to each other. Now some practical realities to go along with this. We're called to commit. We're called to commit to community, not to build community or to find community. I don't mean to put too fine a point on that but I think there is a truth there that we should understand that when we are in Christ we are in this place of blessing. We are in this place where all of the spiritual blessings that Paul talks about at the beginning of Ephesians have come to us because we are now in the Beloved. We're in Christ. It is God who has given us the gift of community. It's not up to us to create community, to build community, to find community.

Someone leaves the church and they say I just couldn't find community. I just didn't belong in that place. I'm not saying that that doesn't ever happen, but I think the way we express that? What are you looking for as you come to a church? I'm looking for community. I think we may have that a little backwards. We step into the gospel. We step into belonging to Christ. We step into a community that God has created, that God has built, that God has established.

What do we do with that truth? This is where I think this is practical. Let's look at this fourth point. In this take away from these last verses, I think this is what God would have us see, that He has in fact created this place to belong. I'm going to begin reading at verse 16: "...that He might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens. but you are fellow

citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Same expression that we saw last week. “...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...” So he is talking about something that exists. We step into that household of God. “...Christ Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” So if it's not our job to make it, to build it, to create it, to find it, what are we supposed to do? I want to suggest to you that it's our responsibility to commit to it. It's our responsibility to commit to this community that God has created. I look at this and I say here are five practical things that you and I can do to step into this sense of community, to step into this place of belonging that God has created.

First of all, we commit to community when we gather together for worship. Just as we're doing now. When the writer of Hebrews says in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter and in the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse and he says to us: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” We all know there are good habits and there are bad habits. Bad habits should be dropped. Bad habits should go away. Bad habits we should try to break ourselves free from. But there are some habits that are good. The habit of getting up on Sunday morning and coming and assembling with the people of God is a good habit. Don't be embarrassed. Don't apologize for having a habitual commitment and desire to being with the people of God. That's exactly what we're commanded to do. In fact, he warns us that there's coming a day, and who could argue that we aren't in that day and in that time when people are going to find this less and less essential, less and less important, less and less significant. So we come together and we commit to assembling together just as he has said to worship, to hear the Word of God read, to hear the Word of God taught, to sing, to lift our voices together in powerful praise of our God, to do all of the things as we pray



for each other and commit to this place and this time, to be a physical presence in each other's lives.

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul exhorts this young Timothy, this young pastor Timothy to preach the Word in season and out. Don't ever equivocate from that responsibility. Don't ever let your church wither because they're not being taught the Word of God. Don't yield to the moment of our culture and our time and substitute the Word of God for other things. We know in Ephesians 5 he addressed the whole matter of public worship in singing and he said that we are to give ourselves to psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord. All of that is a part of this commitment to belong and to step in to community together. We do that when we commit to gathering together for worship. Which, by the way, impacts as well what you do on Saturday night. If you're doing all kinds of stuff on Saturday night that detract and take away from any thought of what's coming in the morning or you're doing it so late into the night that you don't even want to get up in the morning, all of that is impactful on this commitment that we have to make to community.

Secondly, we commit to community when we celebrate baptism and the Lord's supper. We will do that at the end of our morning this morning and as we do at the end of each month when we gather together. We end in a special time of remembering and of reflecting on what it is that God has done. I would encourage you when you see the Lord's supper, when you see communion, when you see baptism on the church calendar and you realize that is a special day and a special time. It's one of those don't miss Sundays. Now I've said before, every Sunday is a don't miss Sunday, but those are really times when you want to be together as the people of God and to experience the grace of God together in here and learn of the work of God in other people's lives. I hope before too long we'll be able to do baptism again and get that on the calendar before the fall is even over. If you've not been baptized, then get your name on that list and be a part of that celebration. That's a part of what we commit to.

Thirdly, we commit to community when we join a small group. Yes, this is an unashamed commercial for small groups again. You've got in your bulletin the list of community groups which is a starting point. It doesn't have to be the endpoint. It's not the end-all but it's a beginning point. You've got to step into a setting that is smaller than

this if you're going to grow deeper in sharing life with others. You're going to have to be able to know each other on a different level than we get to do in this setting. You just heard from Jay with regard to men's groups. There are men's groups that meet throughout the week at different times and you can jump into a small group of men and share life together. I think Jay would be up here every morning at 6:00 if we had a group of guys. The ladies' Bible studies are going on. We'll have a rollout here in a week or two of Bible studies that are going to be starting. You have to commit to being a part of something where you get into a setting where people know you where you can share life, where you can pray for each other, where you can hold each other accountable. That's part of the journey that we're on together.

Number four. We commit to community when we use our spiritual gifts in serving others. We use our spiritual gifts by caring for each other, by sharing in each other's lives, by giving. You've got a spiritual gift. You probably have more than one spiritual gift. You should know what that gift is so that you can be exercising and using that gift. It is what Paul says. I don't want you to be ignorant about what your spiritual gifts are. We need to use those gifts. The body of Christ depends on everybody contributing and using the gifts that God has given to us.

There's a terrible disease sweeping through the church. It is more deadly and contagious than Covid 19 and is called consumerism. Consumerism. It says how can you serve me. What can you do for me? I want you to give me something. The very description of a New Testament believer is the exact opposite of that. It is somebody who's saying how can I serve. How can I be a blessing to somebody else? How can I give of myself? How can I can use the spiritual gifts that God has given to me? We're going to give an account to the Lord for what we've done with the spiritual gifts that we have. Some of you are going to have to explain to your Savior how it is that you took that spiritual gift and you buried it instead of developing it and using it for the glory of God in the advancement of the gospel.

Then the last one. We commit to community when we covenant in membership. We commit to community when we covenant in membership. I always tell folks in the new member's class that this step that they're taking of being a part of Covenant Community Church by means of membership is they're really saying by joining I belong

here. I belong here. You come. You get connected and you get to a point you say I belong. I want to be a part of. I want to be counted on. I want to be accountable to. That is a part of the process and steps that we take in membership. We do those classes periodically. We'll do again one hopefully this fall. If you're not a member and you're interested in that, be looking for the announcement and dates because that is just one more way of saying I'm committed to the body of Christ and committed to this place and to these people. I want to be counted on in that way.

Listen, my friends. the need and desire that God has placed in every one of our hearts is the same. That need and desire is a sense of needing to belong, of being a part of something bigger than ourselves, and clearly that is in this instance the church of Jesus Christ. God has designed the church to be a part of filling that need that He has placed in your heart and soul. He wants you to be committed to that matter of community and belonging.

So what can we take away from this? It's going to be simple and straightforward. Here it is. What steps are you going to take to move past just attending or just being around and truly belonging and being known? This really calls for you to take the next step. We like to talk here at Covenant about the next step. What is the next step? For somebody, the next step is to step from outside of the gospel and to embrace the gospel. It is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He came, that He died on the cross, that He did that for us, that He was raised again. When we believe that God forgives our sin and He gives us eternal life, that's the first step, but it may be the next step for you. For many of you, that next step is related to belonging and a commitment to being a part of and to grow. To be a part of this mandate that we talked about of being a disciple who makes disciples. Don't sell yourself short. Be a disciple who is committed to making other disciples. Put yourself in a place where you can grow and be encouraged and then you can take, as Paul said to Timothy, the baton and you pass it on and you be faithful in what God has given to you and you be faithful in passing that on to others. That may be your children in many instances. It may be people within your family group. It may be people within the body of Christ here and may be people within your neighborhood and where you work.

God has called us to being faithful and it begins by the longing and committing to the body of Christ. We extend that invitation to you this morning to consider. Are there any clues on this page as to what you might commit to next? I hope so. There's like five of them that will help you to have a sense of belonging to the body of Christ and especially as we think in terms of this church here at Covenant. But more than anything else we want you, whether you're here or whether you're listening from home, to understand this glorious gospel, this life-changing message. We want you to be brought near because of what Jesus did on the cross. We want you to know that there's nothing that you can do to earn God's favor. There's nothing that you can do to add what Jesus has done. He said it was finished. It was enough, and the Father raised Him from the dead in acknowledgment that what Jesus did on the cross was all that was necessary. Believe that this morning and God will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank You for this great and marvelous gospel, this life-changing truth that takes us from being outside, estranged from You and people without hope in this world. It brings us into this place of blessing, this place of belonging, this place of community. Father God, we thank You for this place. Thank You for these people. Thank You for the work of the Spirit that You are going to do in our lives and our hearts in these coming weeks and months. Father God, we ask that You will do a great and glorious work for Your honor, for Your glory. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.