

Service Overview

Speaker: Colleen Alford

Sermon Series: At The Table With One Another

Message: Knowing We Belong

Scripture Reference: Romans 12:4-8

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Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

Good morning, welcome to Parramatta Baptist Church. My name is Daniel, one of the leaders. And we're going to start our service with praise and worship. So, let's all stand up and give God praise.

Worship Singing

Song: God Is Able by Hillsong Worship

Song: Goodness of God by CeCe Williams

Song: A Thousand Hallelujahs by Brooke Ligertwood

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Our God and our father, what a joy and privilege it is to be here this morning. Our heart's desire is to worship you every day that we live, but also this morning at this time we gather with one another. And we worship you, King, the creator, Redeemer, and Jesus Christ, we exalt your name.

Oh, God, who came to us, lived among us, died for us, and rose again. We worship you, Lord. Yeah, a thousand hallelujahs are not enough. We praise your name, father. I pray that as we gather here that we would have a sense of your presence by the Holy Spirit, and I ask that you would speak to us through him by your word, but just in that gentle whisper as well, and that we would find strength and encouragement from that, as well as from each other.

Lord, we ask that your name would be glorified, and Lord, that we would be blessed by our time together. In Christ's name we ask, amen.

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Well, good morning everyone. Please find a seat. If it looks a little quieter this morning, we have 116 of our young people and their leaders away this weekend at their youth camp. Kathy and I each received texts from Ben last night at 1:30 AM, just to let us know that it's going really well.

It's been really encouraging that a number of our young people have this weekend to recommit themselves in their faith to God. And so continue to pray for them. They'll be wrapping up this morning and hitting home this afternoon, but we thank God for that, for what's already taking place. Jim* do you want to come and talk about hospitality Sunday? Grab a microphone. So a few weeks ago, Jonathan was running around getting people who are willing to host, and my understanding is you've got a you've got a number of hosts now. You're good with hosts.

Jim*: Yeah, I think we've got around 50 places. So now, what we're looking for is for people who would love to go to somebody else's place for lunch and get to know other people. Okay, so, if you haven't heard already, it's on June the 16th for the 10:45 AM congregation, so you're all welcome. And if you're new, yes, you're very much welcome as well, even if you're visiting. So basically what it

is, it's just a chance for us to get together over a meal and just get to get to know to one another, encourage one another and share our stories and have a great time.

We don't get to do that all too often outside of church, so it's a real opportunity. We really welcome everyone to join in. After church, I'll be going around, I've got the sign-up sheets here, so please feel welcome to approach me, otherwise I might just approach you!

Stephen: Excellent. Thank you very much. Appreciate that. I did want to do that while the kids and families are in the room, because sometimes people can miss out on what's going on at the service. Also, just a really quick thing before our kids go out, if you are new to the life of Parramatta Baptist Church, just a couple of things I'd love to just encourage you with. Firstly, this afternoon we're having an afternoon tea, and it's for anyone who is new to the life of Parramatta Baptist Church and would like to know a little bit more about who the church is.

So I welcome to bring children as well to that, we'll meet at 2:30 PM down in the basement, which is directly underneath where you're sitting, and it'll run from 2:30 to 4:00 PM. There'll be some of us on the pastoral team who'll be there, some who have been regulars of the life of the church there, as well as hopefully many people who are new to the life of the church. So please feel free to come along at 2:30. If you get a chance after the service, let Reuben, Kathy, or myself know that you're coming. That would be good.

The other thing that if you are new that would be good for you to know is that we do send out a newsletter on Fridays at 12:30 PM. It contains everything that's going on in the life of our church, so we don't do a physical newsletter. We have information in the foyer, but the best way to find out about our church and what's happening is to get the newsletter. If you give us your email address, we will link you into that. You can either scan the QR code near the little post box, which is there by the door, or you can fill in a hard card for that and do that.

I know sometimes people ask, and we don't take up an offering. But, there is that post box there, which can be used as an offering place and there are some offering envelopes always there as well, which you're welcome to use. Otherwise you can have a look on our website or the newsletter for how to give. As a church, everything that we do here is fully supported by the people and the generosity of those in this place, and we're really appreciative of that.

Mission Spot *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Well, one of the things we love to do is to share stories of ways that God is moving in the lives of people. And so I want to invite Jade* to come and to share with us some of the ways that God has been leading her recently. You're about to step out in mission for six months in mid-July, and going to overseas to work with a mission organisation. So I would just love for you to be able to share with us, how is it God led you to this point? Because it's not like you go, "let's see, where in the world would I love to go? Hmm, this random country sounds good!" Has God been leading you?

Jade: Yeah, I feel like I definitely felt a sense that it was from God because, it wasn't something I would have initiated and found on my own and signed up for of my own intuition. So, yeah, probably about six months ago, I felt God was really challenging me to actually ask those questions about what it actually is to trust God with your future, and not have a plan for your life that you're just kind of asking God to fit into, and actually, surrender those kind of ideals about what you think you're meant to be doing, especially when you're in your 20s.

You can often be comparing yourself to things and goals you think that you should be doing, getting married, getting a better job. I feel like God was calling me to say, "trust me. Surrender all the things you think you should be doing and just have a willing heart and see where that leads."

So, I reached out to the mission organisation. I'm also a midwife, and so I wanted to do something that was a celebration of like that and the skills I can bring in that space, but also how God can use me for the kingdom. So, I reached out, and they had this placement overseas. I was really apprehensive at the beginning and felt like it was something that was maybe a later thing.

I was just wanting to dip my toe in and do a few weeks somewhere really picturesque and safe, somewhere that was on a postcard. But then I felt like I parked that idea and looked elsewhere because I'm still learning how to fully trust God and just say yes when he's asking me to do things.

But he kind of led me right back to this particular placement. And seeing the need that there, the kind of the maternal health and how dire it is over there. It just kind of made sense that that's where God was calling me.

Kathy: I love your willingness to say yes to him, and I love that that you've really stepped this out over a period of time. It's not like a little high that you had and went, "cool. Change the world." But this has really been an ongoing journey of surrender. And I really honour the authenticity of that journey. What are you going to be doing?

Jade: So I'll be there for six months. I leave about the middle of July, and I'll be volunteering at a school there that supports and trains the midwives that go and work in the hospital in their communities, as they don't have a midwife there currently, so they're kind of teaching themselves.

So, you know, I'll hopefully be able to impart that aspect of things and be able to help support them and train them so that they can go back into their communities and help to make birth something that's not a life or death event.

It should be something that people feel equipped with the skills to manage and it's a place where that Christianity is quite accepted. It's more discipling of the students and being in relationship with them and getting to freely speak the gospel as I'm teaching and partner with them in Bible studies. I'm just kind of opening the door to where God might use me and just trying to say yes and be brave.

Kathy: You say Christianity is quite accepted, and yet, we were talking about it, and so probably about a third of the population would have animistic beliefs, a third would be perhaps Muslim, and the rest Christian, but whatever version of that that perhaps has been handed down to them, because that same lack of training for midwives also goes through to pastors and churches and things as well, so whatever version of Christianity they've encountered on YouTube.

So there's lots to do in that arena of discipleship, right through from someone who perhaps is aware of the spiritual world, but doesn't yet know Jesus, right through to someone who has a version of Jesus and perhaps could be more grounded in their faith as well. So I love that that those two things go together. I love that you'll be helping people give birth to new life physically, but then hopefully, have those doors of opportunity to help see people find new life spiritually as well. Babies all round, we say. So, what are some of your hopes for what God might do in you and also through you?

Jade: Yeah, like you were saying, I think there's a really nice marriage of how I see the way that God designs pregnancy and birth and the new life in him and his redemption and grace. So, yeah, being able to press in to the spiritual needs and really go as a learner, and go as someone that's not going with the idea to fix anything, but actually really just be able to partner with God in the work that he's already doing there and, say that, yeah, I'm broken as well.

And, you know, through that spiritual brokenness the Holy Spirit can work through us all. I'm hoping to tap into that midwifery side of things and be able to really help address those more tangible needs. But then, also be able to see the work that God's doing there and what opportunities he might have, whether it's more of that relationship and helping others to grow in faith or outreach trips to different villages. There are some still some unreached population groups over there. I think I'll be learning a lot and kind of trusting that God will use my willingness to be part of the bigger picture. He's already at work there, and it's just a privilege that I can be a part of that.

Kathy: Yeah, yeah. Are you encouraged to hear Jade's step of faith in this? I reckon I probably speak on behalf of most of us that our desire would be that we would stand with Jade, not just go 'good

luck!' But that we stand with you as you do embark on these six months. What are some of the ways that we can do that?

Jade: Yeah, I'm really looking for prayer support as I go. I think it would be a really difficult time, spiritually, and I'll be quite humbled by the luxuries that we take for granted here., I'll be living in a house that has no electricity and no shower or anything. So it will be a challenge. But yeah, just that real reliance on God, that deep trust that the safest place to be is just where he's calling me and to be abiding in him as a real foundation. There's more spiritual needs, but also for safety, and it's obviously a place that has conflict and there's instability. The area I'm going to is quite well set up to be pretty safe, but safety is all relative, I'll be in a secure area and working in a school that's like, pretty safe.

But still, just that God will keep me safe and bring me home and that I'll just trust him with the process, but also that things like the visa would go smoothly. And I've got a prayer update subscription, so if you're tech savvy, there's a QR code. Otherwise, there's lots of prayer cards at the back, feel free to just grab one. And I'll send some updates out in my email updates monthly or so. Or, you can just write your name on the form at the back. But yeah, I would love to have that prayer base. So, yeah, really, this is God's work that I'm doing. It's not anything in my own strength.

Kathy: So, we can come alongside you and pray for you. For those who are old school, like me, might pop your face up on the fridge with your little prayer card, and be prompted when I go to cook dinner, "pray for Jade." But also, there's an opportunity, I think, for us in this too, if you want to extend that support into financial support.

Julia's is self-funding the trip, it's going to cost about \$15,000. If you want to make a financial contribution toward that, then you can do that by putting that into our Parramatta Baptist Church bank account. But just put the tagline for Jade, and then that money will be redirected back to Jade to help fund her and as a tangible way of saying, "we're in this with you. We partner with you as you go."

In that vein, would you like to stand? Let's pray for Jade together. Oh, Lord God, I want to thank you so much for Jade. Lord God, I just thank you for her responsiveness to the ways that you have been tapping her on the shoulder and drawing her to a bigger picture than just the standard expectations of someone her age. Jesus, I thank you for the surety of the call that she carries, and I thank you, Lord God, that your call on her will be the place, where she can return to when things are hard.

Lord, that she knows that she is exactly where you would have her be. Father, we want to pray your blessing over her. Jesus, we pray that you would go before her physically, Lord, that you would protect her from anything that would seek to come against her. Any illness, or any danger. Lord God, would you watch over her all of her ways?

Oh, God, would you keep her strong and well and able to do all that you've called her to do? Lord, we pray too for her spiritually as well. Lord, I want to thank you for the depth of spiritual maturity and wisdom that Jade carries. Lord God, and I just want to thank you that this is a place that she can return to again and again as she serves you, Lord God, that she knows who she is in you.

She knows you to be a good God. And Lord God, I just want to pray that as she encounters spiritual darkness and different ways that evil manifest overseas, Lord God, I just want to thank you that Jade knows you as victor, Lord Jesus. And so we pray, Lord, for your protection. We also want to pray for that place of growing and being strong in that place as well.

And, father, yeah, I just want to pray too emotionally for Jade as she steps into this. Oh, God, for all the challenges and the adjustments that will go before her. Oh, Lord, would you counsel her every day? Thank you for the quiet whispers of your Holy Spirit. Thank you for the ways that he will keep directing her and encouraging her, comforting her, opening doors of opportunity.

And Lord God, I do want to pray, Lord, in that emotional place. I pray for courage, the courage to step into the places, the opportunities that you will open up, places that you will have her go. Thank you that you go before her. And we pray, Jesus that she will bear fruit for your kingdom's sake, that women's lives and babies lives will be saved as a result of the training that she does. And Lord God, we want to pray that there will be those who come to faith in Jesus. Those who are strengthened in their faith in Jesus as well. Amen.

Bible Reading: Romans 12:4-8 (NIV UK)

4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your[a] faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Sermon: At The Table - Knowing We Belong *Speaker: Colleen Alford*

Good morning. Let me prayerfully begin.

Lord, I thank you for the opportunity to come together this morning and celebrate you, and hear about all that you're doing, in the lives of our family here. And, Lord, I just pray that we will have open hearts now to allow your spirit to work in us and to have the testimony of your word being living and active in our lives. Amen.

One of the things that I found most helpful in my relationship with God, and actually, probably in life in general, is trying to work out who I am and specifically who I am in God. And I can assure you,

this is definitely an ongoing process. As a teenager, I had a poster in my room, of all the things I am in relation to God, 'I am new, I am loved, I am chosen, etc. etc.', and I wrote these things out in my journal. I read them every time I came into my room. I inscribed them on my heart, remembering them. And I'm trying my best to live them out. And in the turbulent seas of adolescence and then adult life, knowing who I am in Christ has been my anchor, grounding me, steadying me, keeping me safe, and knowing that I don't have to weather these seas on my own.

One of the identity verses that I have loved the most is 1 John 3. *'See what great love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!'*

How good is that verse that the father has lavished his love on us? We are his children, and we can be absolutely confident of that. There are a number of other passages in the Bible that talk about us being the children of God. John 1:12 says, *'yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to be called children of God.'*

We are children of God. I am a child of God, and you are a child of God. And there is no discrimination in who can be a child of God. In Galatians 3:26-29 it says, *'so in Christ you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'*

So if I'm a child of God and you guys are children of God, what does that make us in relation to each other? My brothers and sisters, right? We have family. Now, I could break out in song here, but given you are all my family and it's being recorded, I'm definitely not going to. But hopefully that song has now got stuck in your head. And each time it pops into your head throughout the day, you can curse me. And also remember the points of this sermon.

Because we belong to God, we also belong to each other. Who we are here determines who we are here. So what does it mean to belong together and to be family? First of all, that means that we have an identity as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. We have an identity. As we read in John 1, when we believe in God, he gives us the right to be his children. We get our birthright and we become part of God's family. In Ephesians 3:14-15 it says, *'for this reason I kneel before the father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name.'*

And we've been learning about in the previous sermon series about heroes of the faith, about how important names are. And our father has given us his name. We have his love, and because of him, we have an identity. We are children of God and all that that means—being loved, being forgiven, being made new. We have an identity this way because of who we are in Jesus, but he also gives us an identity this way as his church family, brothers and sisters. We have an identity and we have a place. And our identity spans continents, even remote communities.

And it spans generation upon generation. So who here has traced their family history into the old school way by using libraries? Or maybe Ancestry.com? Anyone? Couple of people. Well, people are hungry to know their family identity and ancestry. So in 2020, Ancestry.com was sold. Who would like to guess how much it was sold for? \$4.7 billion. That's how much people want to understand their identity and who they are in the context of family.

And the extra special part of our identity in Christ is that we have our own individual identity, and we have a shared identity. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made, created unique, each with our own personality and temperament and interests and gifts. We are all different. And as was read to us, the Bible likens us to the human body all being different and having different roles and abilities and purposes, but working together.

Our differences are part of being God's incredible creation. And alongside this individual identity, we have our shared identity, a unifying identity. As children of God, loved, a new creation. Isn't it great that we get to be ourselves, but also be part of something much bigger?

The second thing that it means to belong together, to be family, is that we have connection now. Being part of a family just happens. You get born into a human family and when you become a Christian, you become part of God's family. It's an unconditional love. But there's a big difference between just being in a family and being in a family that feels connected and close, and connection takes time and intentionality.

Being part of a family, including God's family, is automatic, but being connected as a family is a work in progress. Maybe in your earthly family, you've had to make a decision at some point to be more intentional about spending time together due to the busyness of life. Maybe you've reduced after school activities. Maybe you've got a screen ban during meal times or after a certain time at night. Maybe you've introduced family dinners or family fun days. Because if we didn't do this, weeks would just speed by. Why wouldn't they? But these things take time and thought and commitment to investing in each other.

I wonder how you can be more intentional about investing in this wonderful family here. Because as we spend time with others, we get to share experiences. We get to learn about each other and from each other, and we get to grow together. Meaningful connection is such a special part of being family, and it's a powerful antidote to the loneliness and isolation of our world and culture.

The third thing that it means to be family is to be accepted. Being able to be received as I am, as you are, not having to achieve or prove anything, or meet anyone's expectations of what you should be like. It's a freedom to be who you are and not a version of yourself that feels expected in a particular situation or circumstance.

And where can we find someone that knows us completely, warts and all, and still loves us fully? Jesus offers that perfect acceptance. So, in being part of God's family, we are accepted. God's love is unconditional and as promised in Romans 8, *'Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'* And as we read earlier, *'there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.'*

So I think it's pretty safe to say that acceptance is a key value of our family. Our father demonstrates his acceptance of us every single day, and as modelled by our father, we too are to accept the people around us, each other. Romans 15:7 says, *'accept one another then, just as Christ has accepted you in order to bring praise to God.'*

And our acceptance is to be countercultural. We are asked not just to accept the people that are similar to us, or the people that we like, we are asked to reach out and love and accept those that society forgets or sees as less. Hebrews 13:1-3 says, *'keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.'*

There are two key things that help us to be accepting people. The first is our father, his example, his grace in our lives that overflows into the lives of others, and his spirit helping us and shaping us. And the second thing that's really helpful is remembering to see people how God sees them—his creation, his children made in his image. Your brothers and sisters. Now there will still be people that feel hard to accept. People that do things that annoy you. But it's so much easier to accept people when we see them as God sees them and value them the same way that God does.

Which leads me to my fourth point, there will be ups and downs. Now, are there any perfect families out there? My husband and brothers did not raise their hands this morning in the 8:45 service. There are no perfect families. All families experience ups and downs. Times of feeling disconnected, disappointed, hurt and in conflict. Unfortunately, part of life is being human and in relationship with other humans. At times we are going to hurt each other and be in conflict.

But this hurt and disappointment can run really deep, and it can have a flow on effect and impact other relationships too, as we seek to try and prevent being hurt or ending up in conflict again. It can be easy to let hurt and disappointment dictate how willing we are to interact with other people, or how willing we are to be real and vulnerable. For some people, hurt and disappointment creates a distrust of people, and the desire to not experience hurt again leads to relational risk aversion, withdrawing, closing yourself off from others as a way to protect yourself from getting hurt again. But what starts out as a protective mechanism can pretty quickly lead to social isolation, disconnection, or maybe just surface level interactions with others. The position of cutting off or closing in, retreating into our shell can be a pretty lonely place to be, and it can also make it hard for other people to know how to reach out and connect with you.

For other people, hurt and disappointment might mean that they are in the 'I'm fine, everything is fine' category, when everything is not. Maybe you are willing and pretending that everything is fine even when it isn't, and just waiting and hoping for the conflict to go away on itself by itself. Or maybe you take more of a hands on approach to hurt and conflict. Maybe you are quick to point out difficulties and differences, and settle in quickly to your own position, and only your position. Maybe it doesn't take much for you to feel wronged, or to point that out to others.

All three of these responses to hurt and disappointment perpetuate hurt and can pretty easily lead to disconnect, and we miss out on the opportunity of being in relationship with each other and being part of relationships that enrich our lives and grow ourselves and replicate the Kingdom of God. And I think the other aspect of these three responses to hurt and conflict is that they are an attempt to be self-reliant, to try to fix things or do things on our own, in our own strength, and not rely in trusting God or working with others.

So let's be brothers and sisters that make the most of our father's grace and his example of forgiveness. Let us be the type of family that is committed to working through hurt and disappointment and conflict. Let's be the type of family that doesn't allow patterns of cutting off or closing in, or pretending that everything is okay, or protecting ourselves from hurt at the cost of connection.

Working through hurt and conflict really is an opportunity to grow in ourselves and to deepen and grow the relationship with that person or people. And it helps us learn not to hold our perspective so tightly that it gets in the way of relationship. We learn to be flexible and to grow and to respond to what is happening.

The fifth thing that it means to be a family of Christ is that we share an inheritance. As children of God, we are also heirs. Romans 8:17 says, *'now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.'*

And this is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. And what is our inheritance? And what does it mean for us as a church? Our inheritance includes all that God has intended for us—his grace, his redemption, eternal life with him. Now there's a whole sermon on this topic which, do not fear, I'm not going to try to squeeze in, but our inheritance is definitely something that we can look forward to and we can anticipate, but it also impacts us in the here and now.

As a family of Christ, we are not just living for the present, we are living for eternity. It's not just about what's happening here on earth. We hold eternity in our hearts together and our inheritance enriches us. It binds us together. It gives us purpose and it gives us perspective. And perspective is really helpful when it comes to managing the previous point of the ups and downs of life.

And finally, as family, we get to eat together. There is lots of family time that happens around meals, isn't there? Even when you do grow up with three teenage brothers like I did and were over quick as a flash. There's still so much good stuff that happens at family meal times, and there has been some fascinating research studies that have found that regular family dinners are associated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, tobacco use, as well as associated with higher rates of resilience and higher rates of high self-esteem.

So Jesus is really on to something when he set up the ritual of the last supper. When he said to break bread and drink to remember him, he was setting up a routine for us that gets us to come together to eat together and to be together while we focus on him. But Jesus invites us to the table not just to commune with him, but also to commune with each other our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And can I just say, it's not about the food. I think shows like MasterChef and My Kitchen Rules have done us a bit of disservice about the pressure we put on ourselves, about what hospitality looks like. If we make coming together to the table all about the food, we can easily end up flustered. We can blow our budget, and we can be focused on the task rather than the people. We can be a Martha rather than a Mary.

I recently went to London for two weeks for a study trip for my PhD, and during that time I ate at some amazing places. If we were in London, it would be pub lunch, Sunday roast dinner, which is up there on the screen. I had really done my research about how I should make the most of my time in London when it came to food. But none of these food experiences were my favourite food experiences of the trip. The food was good, but it didn't make a meaningful and rich experience. Why? Because I was eating alone.

But what was my favourite food experience? Cake club in the Eating Disorders Research Hub on a Friday afternoon. So, we were all in a very dingy, drafty London room in a very rundown hospital. We all brought a plate of sweets to share. There were no plates to eat, the cakes had no spoons, no serviettes, not even a kitchen to make a cuppa to have with our cakes. But it was so meaningful because it was all the researchers or the academics and old me sitting around laughing, eating, talking about our different cultures and sharing how we get through the hard parts of the work that we do. And I felt like I belonged.

So let's not be focused on the food or let it stop us from feeling like we can invite others to our table or from being able to join in the conversation and connect with others. Let's have each other over. Sign up for Hospitality Sunday, meet in a park for a picnic. Get to know each other after the service. Eating together is part of being family.

And while coming to the table literally is certainly a good thing, backed by Jesus and by research, we are also called to come to the table together, metaphorically, to join together as family, to seek to be

family in action and in spirit, not just in words. To spend time together and to communicate with each other, to work through hurts and conflicts, to grow and be flexible, to accept each other and to belong together.

That may be the idea of belonging and family are two concepts that don't really go together for you. Maybe family has been a difficult experience for you, and we do have another way that the Bible explains our belonging to each other, and that is the body of Christ and in the passage read earlier. As the body of Christ, we are designed to be together, to be different but unified. Working as one again when no one is better than the other. You only have to have one body part. Don't you hate how it takes one part to stop working properly to realize how vital that part is in the functioning of the body? I learned how valuable saliva glands last year when mine stopped working. Never thought of them before that.

So this passage about the Body of Christ. We are all in it together. But one verse that really stood out to me is verse 5, where it says, *'so in Christ, we though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.'* Each member belongs to all the others. We belong together. The body of Christ's church is about the we, not about the me.

We are in this together. We are connected. And it's about loving and serving and growing with each other, giving over that focus on ourselves, and really belonging to each other. And directly after this body of Christ passage, in Romans 12, that we have the call to put love in action. And I want to read that aloud now as it summarizes beautifully what it means to belong together and all that we've been thinking about this morning.

'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'

So which parts of this call to love in action, this call to be God's family, do you want to grow in? Maybe it's honouring others above yourself. Maybe it's practicing hospitality and investing your time into church family relationships. Maybe it's seeing everyone as a child of God and not just accepting those that are like you. Maybe it's living at peace with the people around you and working through the conflict.

So let's commit this morning to not just reflecting on these points, but actioning some of these points. Wholly committed to belonging together. It feels so right to celebrate communion together this morning, as we as we wrap up our time together, because Jesus absolutely knew the

importance of connecting, of being real and vulnerable. And he showed us how to do this in the last supper with his disciples, to come together, united in him, to reflect on him, and to remember his death and all that it means for us. And it is through his blood in his body that we are family, and that we can be a body working together.

Communion *Speaker: Colleen Alford*

I invite you to come to the communion table and take a cup and take some bread. But, please go back to your seat, remain standing and hold on to the bread and the juice because we're going to eat and drink together. So I invite you to come to the table and grab your juice and bread and head back to your seat.

Okay, so we're going to start by taking the bread and eating this now, remembering and reflecting on the way that Jesus's body was broken for us, demonstrating the father's love and his desire to be in relationship with us and for us to be family.

And now we're going to take the cup. And as we take the cup, I invite you to celebrate how Jesus' death enabled us to be family, to be his family. A family with literally the best father in the universe. A family who have been given our father's name and his inheritance. A family that are unconditionally loved and accepted. A family asked to gather together, to love God and to love others united by Christ's way of family. Let's drink.

Father God, I thank you so much that we are family, that you have loved us unconditionally and gone to great lengths. Thank you for pursuing relationship with us so that you can be our father, and so that we can have each other, your church, as our brothers and sisters. Thank you that we don't do life alone. Thank you that we have you with us all the time. And we have your people. Thank you, Lord, for unifying us and for being our dad. Amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Good Good Father by Chris Tomlin, Pat Barrett

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

So, father, we thank you for the truth that you love us and that we belong to you. And thank you, father, that we belong to one another as well. But I pray that that truth would also become a lived experience for each one of us. That we would not only know with our heads, but that we would feel it as well.

Just that sense of being your child and of belonging to one another. So, father, in the time that we have together in worship or maybe in small groups through the week, now may we press into that sense of connection in the way in which we relate to one another, the way in which we love, serve, and share with one another, but guide us by your spirit.

Father, we pray for us, those who will be having lunch in Prince Alfred Park in just a little while. With people from such a range of backgrounds, many homeless and nearly all with a very significant need in their lives, I pray that as they sit around tables, as they share life and as they share food, that their sense of loneliness and isolation will be replaced with that sense of connection. We ask your blessing upon them, and we ask your blessing also on those who have since this morning been preparing their lunch for them. I pray that as they serve the food physically, they would also help you be serving in such a way that your grace and your love is evident to all you. So, Lord, may all glory be to you.

Father, son, Holy Spirit, go with us into this week. Remind us afresh each day of your goodness and your grace in our lives for your glory. Amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Stephen Bates*

Please continue to stay, have conversations, engage with one another. If you'd love prayer, there are people down the front of you who would love to pray for you and with you. You're so welcome to come. Don't forget, in a few weeks' time, we'll be having lunch together. So go grab Jim or write your name somewhere and get in contact with us. Bless you.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*