

**Our Only Comfort.,**  
**I Corinthians 6:19; Romans 14:8**  
**April 24, 2016**

When I was in high school, I had to stand up before 600 people and state what I believed about Jesus and what he meant to me. I was scared to death, not so much by standing up in front of all those people, but by getting the words right. Sometimes it is hard to state what is in here (point to heart)– to take what you believe to know to be true and put it into words.

We are in the midst of a new sermon series called “The Creeds.” The creeds are just another way of saying, “This is what I believe.” Christians in the past have taken what we know inside and given it words.

Larry introduced the topic of Creeds last Sunday. He told you about our book called “The Book of Confessions,” which contains creeds written by Christians down through the ages. The first Creed in the book was written in 381 A.D. (The Nicene Creed) and the last one written in 1983. That covers a whole lot of years - 1600 of them!

What we are doing in this sermon series is introducing you to some of our creeds. We (Larry, Paul and I) are each taking a creed and highlighting a very small portion of it...a part we personally really like, a part that gives us the words to that express what is in here – our heart.

Today I am introducing you to the Heidelberg Catechism. Completed in 1562, the Heidelberg Catechism came out of the Reformation. Many of the reformers did not agree with one another, so the Heidelberg Catechism was an attempt to bring them together.

Catechism means a question/answer format, and that is exactly what the Heidelberg Catechism does. It asks a question and then answers it. There are 129 questions and each one is personal, addressed to “you.” We are going to start at the beginning and look at question #1. Before we do, pray with me.

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Question #1 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

This answer comes from the two scripture passages listed in your bulletin:

Romans 14:8 - If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

I Corinthians 6:19 - Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the HS, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.

The word of the Lord....thanks be to God.

Do you have a favorite possession? I have a dining room table inlaid with 8 inch cream colored tile. The tile is hand painted with vines and berries and leaves in the colors of green, burgundy and yellow. I bought it about 20 years ago, and it is still one of my favorite pieces of furniture. When something is of value to you, you take special care of it.

When God spoke to Moses about the people of Israel, God told Moses to say to the people: “ The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples...to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

In the New Testament, it says this about us: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (I Peter 2:9).

You belong to God. You are a treasured possession of God.

It’s so easy for us to think of ourselves primarily in terms of other kinds of belonging: You belong in your family; You belong to Lion’s Club, Rotary Club, the Red Hat Ladies, PEO. I belong among my colleagues at work. We belong to this church. All of these are true, but the primary, defining, transformational belonging of our lives is simply this: We belong to God!

What does that mean – that we belong to God? How does that affect our lives? It means that we can cast all our cares on Our Good Shepherd who cares for us...because we belong to God. It means that God loves us with a love from which we can never be separated...because we belong to God. It means that we need not fear for God is with us...because we belong to God.

In our baptism, when that water hit us, it symbolized God marking us as his own and saying I love you. The author of I John says, “See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!”

Whether you are a success in the world’s eyes or a failure, you belong to God. Whether you achieve all you hope for in life or few of your dreams came true, you belong to God. Whether you were born into a happy home or a troubled one, you belong to God. Whether you’ve had a comfortable life or you’ve struggled all the way, you belong to God. Whether you’ve been much loved or largely ignored, you belong to God.

If you have an addiction, it means you do not belong to that thing which you crave. You belong to God.

If you are ill, it means you do not belong to this body or to that cancer or heart disease. You belong to God.

If you are depressed, it means you do not belong to the sadness. You belong to God.

If you have been abused, it means you do not belong to the person or the memories that hurt you. You belong to God.

You need not regret the past or fear the future. You belong to God.

You need not conform yourself to the opinions of others or struggle to win their approval. You belong to God.

You need not grasp for riches or fame or success or power in order to find meaning and purpose for your life. It’s found in belonging to God.

You need not be afraid of death because God accompanies you on that journey. You belong to God.

And even though it might feel like, look like, smell like, hurt like you belong to all these other things, you do not. You belong to God.

Do you get it!? Repeat after me: I belong to God.....

“What is your only comfort in life and in death?” (Read with me the answer)“That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

And the most amazing part of it all is that we belong to God not because of anything we have done or merited on our own, but because God has chosen you. Your name is carved in the palm of that scarred hand. God will never forget you, never abandon you, never leave you. You belong to God.

A story is told of a man who was traveling in Paris who came upon a rather inexpensive amber necklace in a gift shop. Upon returning to the states he was curious as to the value of the necklace so he took it to be appraised. After looking at the necklace under a magnifying glass, the jeweler said, “I will give you \$25,000 for it.”

So surprised was the man, he asked that another expert appraise the necklace. When he did, the owner of the necklace was offered \$10,000 more above the original appraisal. “What do you see that is so valuable?” asked the astonished man. The appraiser responded, “Look through the glass.” There before his eyes was an inscription: “To Josephine from Napoleon.”

The value of the necklace came from its identification with a famous person. As people of faith we are identified with the One who is far more valuable and esteemed than any human on earth (even Prince). It is from our union and association with God that we find our true identity, worth and value. We belong to God.

Perhaps our prayer should be: “Inscribe yourself upon us, Lord, for we belong to You.”

Now this belonging is a great gift to us, but it carries with it a measure of responsibility on our part. I illustrate this by this example.

In the OT days, Jews who were poor would occasionally be forced to sell themselves into service to their fellow Jews. The Law protected them. They were required to be treated with justice, and at the end of six years, they were to be freed from service that they had sold themselves into. However, when that time of servitude was over after 6 years, there was an unusual option for the servant (Exodus 21:2-6).

If the servant developed a strong, positive relationship with his master and was grateful for how he was treated, the servant had the option to stay....although he was under no obligation to do so. The servant could make a voluntary decision to become the master's bond slave.

In this case, a servant would not be signing up for another six-year-stint. Rather, the servant would be making a lifetime commitment. He would be surrendering himself and giving up all his rights—permanently—to his master. The transaction was to be made in a public ceremony where a sharp instrument would be used to pierce a hole in the servant's ear, signifying obedience to his master.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,

*but my ears you have pierced. . .*

I desire to do your will, O my God.

(Psalm 40:6, 8, NIV, italics added)

The first question we ask people who want to become members of this church is this: Who is your Lord and Savior? Of course, the answer is "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior." We know what it means to have Jesus as our Savior – we are saved into a relationship with God that is right now and goes on forever.

But what does it mean for us when we say Jesus is our Lord? Have you ever thought about what that means or looks like in your life?

I think it means we have a hole in our ear. This hole identifies us as servants of Jesus Christ. To be marked as Jesus' servant is to give our lives in the service of the Master, a service of obedience not because we have to, but because we want to. We want to be in the service of our Lord in whom we know and love and trust. This is our responsibility as belonging to God.

I remember the first time I understood this. I grew up in a legalistic type of Christianity where I believed I had to earn God's love by my good behavior. I was filled with guilt

when I failed. It got so bad that I didn't want people to know Jesus because I didn't want them to know the guilt I felt.

That changed one day in a class in seminary. The professor said three words that changed my life: "God choose you." It had nothing to do with me! I didn't have to earn God's love; God simply loved me. I left that class with the burden lifted off my shoulders of trying to please God on my own. Now, I want to obey God not because I have to, but because I want to.

Perhaps our prayer should be: "Make us people with holes in our ears. We want to be identified as servants of Jesus Christ." There is no greater calling. It is not temporary; it is permanent. We are called to make God look glorious in our lives. What will that look like in your life this week?

I received an email on Wednesday from one of our winter residents (she gave me permission to share this with you). As she and her husband were traveling back home, they stopped to see her mother who was dying. She wrote, "We spent four precious hours with her and two hours after we left, she passed. I will be forever grateful for those moments. She lived a fulfilled and grace-filled life and we are so blessed. I felt doubly blessed to read your message for Sunday's sermon Romans 14:8 for my mom truly did live for the Lord and she died to the Lord and she is the Lord's."

Romans 14:8 - If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

May this be your comfort. \_And may you live it out. Amen and amen

Now, take your bulletin, turn it back to where we are in the worship order. Stand and we will state what we believe by saying together the full answer to the question: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"

Answer: That I am not my own,<sup>1</sup>  
but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—<sup>2</sup>to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>  
He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,<sup>4</sup>  
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.<sup>5</sup>  
He also watches over me in such a way<sup>6</sup>  
that not a hair can fall from my head

without the will of my Father in heaven;<sup>7</sup>  
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.<sup>8</sup>  
Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life<sup>9</sup>  
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready  
from now on to live for him.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19-20

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 14:7-9

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2

<sup>5</sup> John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11

<sup>6</sup> John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 8:28

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 8:1-17

## **Blessing**

Repeat after me:

I belong to God

I am inscribed by God

I have a hole in my ear.

Keep this ever before in all that you do this week.

May the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord make his shine on you and be gracious to you.

The lord turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26) Amen