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Knowing We Belong

By John Logan

Today's theme is knowing we belong. We explore how we belong in God's family and how we belong together. This service is not dwelling on Father's Day alone, though we acknowledge it is Father's Day. If you're finding today difficult, know that we are praying for you. If you're finding today joyous, know that we are celebrating with you.

Gates: The Open Door of God

Jacob in this story falls asleep alone. He feels desperately different from everyone else. He's running away from his family problems and sleeping rough with a stone for a pillow. But Jacob dreamt. He dreamt heavily. He dreamt that heaven is not far away. It's just up a stepladder. And God says to him, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go."

Then he gets to the place and he calls it the gate of heaven. Have you ever stood outside a gate and wondered if you're allowed in? If you remember your school days at the school gate the first time, do you think they're going to let me in? Am I worthy? Am I ready? Or the passport gate. That terrifying moment of am I going to be allowed through? Are they going to stop me?

Most gates make us ask questions: Am I welcome? Do I belong here? Will anyone let me in?

But Jacob's experience of God's gate is different. God doesn't stand at the gate checking credentials. He doesn't ask for your passport. He doesn't ask you to prove your residency or show that you've got enough money in your bank account. He doesn't ask for the correct paperwork or visas.

He went looking for Jacob before the gate even was there to be opened. When Jacob thought he was alone, he discovered that God's gate was already open.

Feet: Walking the Journey with God

There's no promise that there will be no rough roads. God walks with us.

I could get for you a pair of different shoes: baby shoes, school shoes, walking boots. Every pair of shoes tells a story. On the river at Budapest, there is a sculpture of shoes. Lots of shoes made out of cast iron are placed along the edge of the river. It's a reminder of the suffering that the Jews had to undergo in the Second World War. Those who were Jewish, travelers, people who were homosexual, suffered so badly. They put these empty shoes as a permanent memorial, as a reminder of the journey those people went on, horrendous as it was.

But you know, if you belong to Christ, you can walk confidently. You don't have to walk alone. You may fall, but Christ is with you. Christ is with you. Because we belong to God, we will never walk alone.

Once you have God by your side, we are God's family. We can call God Abba, Father. Abba is the Hebrew word for father, and it's a very intimate word. It's how you address your dad when you're really close to him. God is our father, our true father, whatever our experiences of fatherhood may be. God is there as our true Father.

Routes: Following Jesus Home

How many of us rely on our satnavs? I do. There are times when you go to your satnav and you think I have no idea where I am. But the satnav sorts us out. Sometimes we get it really wrong. And sometimes the satnav gets it wrong too. That's always frustrating and amusing, particularly when it's trying to get you out of a traffic jam.

Sometimes we take wrong turns, miss exits, get lost and we need to recalibrate and find our way again. We all do it. If someone says, "Oh, but look at so and so. They're perfect," no, they're not. They're human like the rest of us. They'll have times of recalibration.

I always remember Mother Theresa of Kolkata, who devoted her life to the poor in India. She went through a huge period of doubt about her faith and about God. But it was so heartening for so many people to know that even someone like her went through such doubt.

When Thomas asks Jesus where he's going, he asks, "Lord, give us the map. How can we know the way?" And Jesus doesn't hand him a map. He doesn't tell him to look it up on his satnav or put the postcode in. He just says, "I am the way."

The Christian faith is not simply following a route; it's following a person. A satnav can tell you where to go. But Jesus walks with you. A map can show a destination, but Jesus promises a home. Not a destination—a home.

The Father has many rooms. There's not just room for one. It's for loads of you. Everyone who wants to come. It could be anybody. People of other faiths, people of different

persuasions, views, lifestyles. The Father has many rooms. There's lots of room.

Jesus does the same for all of us. Often we learn our faith through those who come before us, those saints in life who you meet on the journey. I can think of many people from my teenage years who acted as an influence, who were really important in helping me find the route that I needed to take. The way of Jesus always leads us home because we belong to the Father's love.

You Belong

Today we've thought about gates, feet, and roots.

Jacob discovered an open gate into God's love. Jesus shows us that the route leads us home. Through it all we rush in one great truth: we know we belong. We belong to the God who seeks us, who walks with us, and welcomes us home.

Whatever our experience of earthly parents, of earthly friends, God walks with us and welcomes us home. We are held in the love of our heavenly Father who says to each one of us, "You are my child and you belong." Amen.