

The Joy to Be From Our Belonging, Where We Came From

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"The Joy to Be From." Who are you? More importantly, not more importantly but whose are you?

Hi my name is Damon Owens. I'm executive director of Joyful Ever After. A ministry dedicated to helping couples live the joy of marriage, of sacramental marriage and all of its challenges. And all of its grace. -And all of its supernatural beauty. We've reflected here earlier. In earlier sessions on joy, and on love, and here we're going to be speaking about the Joy to Be From.-The joy of belonging. So let's begin in a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Father God, you created us in your image, and likeness. You brought your only son to remind us who we are. And of whose we are. That we belong to you. Help us to know and to know our deepest meaning in our hearts and in our minds what it means to be irreplaceable. To belong in such a fundamental way. That it animates the way we see ourselves, the way that we see others, the way that we see the world. How we choose to spend our time. What we choose and act and live and will. In our will. Lord just help us to awaken in us. To remember the power and truth of belonging to you as your sons and daughters. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Who are you? Whose are you? It's as loaded a question as it is a universal question. Our identity has to be both received and accepted. And here's what we know in our church talk. We are children of God, made in his image and likeness. And I say that with, you know, tongue-in-cheek reverence. But it's the reality is we have a certain way we talk as people of God. And our church talk speaks this language that we have to sometimes wrestle from pockets of misunderstanding or non-understanding. We repeat things. And we don't know exactly they mean.

Remember that moment of the baptism of Jesus where the dove came over in that symbol of the Holy Spirit and we heard the voice of the father saying, "You are my son. In whom I am well pleased. I am delighted." Here's what's true. You and I carry the flesh of our mother and our father for all eternity. -Whether we know them or not. That's a natural reality. So also we carry the spirit of our Father for all eternity. -Whether we know him or not. You belong to someone. And you are irreplaceable to them. -Me too. And that should delight your heart as much as it delights mine. We long to belong. We need to belong to someone or to something great. And it's not merely biological, sociological, psychological or; but it's a

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human reality in its totality and in its depth. It really does speak to who we are. Even when we belong based on what we do teams or what we have, money or clothes. We want more. We need to know that we are loved for who we are. Not for what we can do, or what we have.

Somehow each of us knows how shallow and unfulfilling our relationships are. When they're dependent on what we have to do. We need our relationship. And the need for relationships always point to our need to belong. Belonging speaks to our need to know that we're irreplaceable to one another. These words should tingle in our hearts. And our belongings, the stuff, cannot replace our be-longings. I'm trying to get that into a bumper sticker somehow. But our belonging, our stuff cannot replace our be-longings. "Belonging", even in a human family, not even, God created it this way. That our family itself is a nested communio, -relationships.

And from the beginning God designed the family to be the place where we know that we're worthy to be loved for who we are. Not for what we do. Or what we have. This is why the family is God's great masterpiece. You and I are irreplaceable, we're created for joy. Remember that from the previous sessions. Now let's not let the boldness of those claims be lost on us. These claims are bold. And they rest on two fundamental principles. One, that we're created. Meaning that we have a creator. And we're not him. And second, that there's a purpose to our creation. That we're created for joy. And now loaded in that is that joy is something in particular. It's a reality that has to be distinguished as we done earlier, from mere happiness. Which is great. We love to be happy. We also distinguish it from pleasure. Pleasure is good. It's a great gift of being a sensual, bodily creature. Meaning that we can see, smell, hear, taste and touch. When it's pleasing in that experience we experience pleasure. It's beautiful, it's fundamental, without the distortions of sin.

But joy is something altogether different even as it's related to happiness and pleasure. Being created for joy speaks to the truth about who we are in our identity. The joy speaks of the mission of not only what we experience when we live that creation to the full. But also what's worth our time? These limited things in time and space on this side of eternity. What's worthy of our attention? Of our imagination? Of our memory? Of our anxiety if you have, or worry? How to we prioritize, another way; the goods, even that are among us that we can do in the limited amount of time that we have. We can't do everything. We can't have everything. And here is where the beauty of being created for joy begins.

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Let's begin our story in the beginning. Not necessarily with our birth, or our conception. But the whole story of how we're created for joy rests in what I call, and I have called the Christian proposal. And in this case the origin and destiny of the human person. Of which we are irreplaceably part of this story. Our origin that begins earlier than our birth. And a destiny that extends way beyond our natural death. You and I are created by a God who in creating us made us in his image and likeness. To such an extent that it carries with it a dignity. A truth, a reality and a responsibility.

In that we have to continue to ask the question, *why?* Not only why did he create us. But why is it we choose certain things over others? What is it that we are attracted to? -Without even thinking about it? What is it that we're repulsed by? You know attraction and repulsion aren't things we think about as much as we experience. And we encounter. And then we go back and find meaning to it. Well let's meditate for a little bit here on. Again so whether you're Christian or Catholic or not. This is something we can ponder and meditate on. This origin story. That if it doesn't resonate with your heart, you're free to reject it. But my experience has been that this story in its own beauty. And how it resonated in us is not something that's imposed on us from without. It's not something, a story that comes out of nowhere that we're supposed to choose or not choose. But it ends up being something that awakens a memory in us.

One of the examples that I've used for so many years is that it's a radical remembering. The word for that plays against the radical forgetting amnesia. There's a word for radical remembering. We use the amnesia all the time. It's as if you've forgotten something fundamental about who you are. And you get clues here or there. You even see on the TV shows or the movies or the Spanish, the telenovelas, right? Those soap operas where somebody loses their memory and they got that big white bandage around their head. And their sitting in their bed, their hospital bed. And somebody comes in, or plays a song, and they go, "I remember that song. I know you." And they say, "Honey it's me I'm your husband." You know it's not like I don't know who you are there's something in us that that amnesia. It's just not right. It's just not right when somebody doesn't remember who they are. And we look at that we say "that's just wrong."

We root for, we're excited that we want people to remember their special to people that they love. That love them. This belonging piece. And the idea that somehow we would lose that connection to others just wrenches us in our heart. That's why it's one of those devices in movies and TVs for so frequently. They want to grab us in our hearts. And we're excited, excited when their memory comes back. Because we're like that's the way the world should be.

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When we speak of radical remembering, we're talking about remembering back to the fore; recognizing if you will, literally recognizing. Knowing again what we really have known before. So let's get into the story and see if it doesn't resonate with your heart like a song. That it may stir up a memory that you didn't even know that you had. So that it counters the amnesia with what we call anamnesis. That's the radical remembering. What is the anamnesis in our story that our scriptures tell us?

We believe in a God who from the beginning did what only God could do. Only God could create something out of nothing. And the original stories in the Christian and Hebrew bible begin with poetry. Because poetry is that poetic knowledge that allows us to move beyond the boundaries of where say scientific knowledge can go.

Now many of you know I'm a recovering engineer. Meaning I'm trained with degrees and I've worked in companies. Even had my own company for a while. So I love science but there's a certain place where science has a boundary where it just can't go. Or the theories and all the testing just can't pass. Poetry allows us to move not only to where the creation and science can be measured and analyzed, -but past that boundary. Where we can enter into the creation of the material that we would study. Here God does what only God can do. He creates something out of nothing. Whether you're looking at that first creation story of Genesis one, or Genesis two. There are two perspectives. These are two different perspectives of the same event. And here the first one is in a sense God's view to man. Genesis one. And Genesis two can be understood as the creation event from man's view to God.

Like many things we'll talk about in this reflections. Many things that are inherent, centered in the Christian faith. Is that we don't look at things in isolation. We put things together. I think it was Rabbi Lord Sacks who had the beautiful quote that says, "Science and Western thought tends to take things apart in order to understand how they work. Religion puts things together to understand what they mean." I love that. And we want to understand the meaning of who we are, and the meaning of our life, and the purpose, and the mission. And we now, we use not only poetic knowledge. But we use these terms that help us bind ourselves, to put ourselves together, to figure out what they mean. And when we put these things together, two things together. We see that God, Genesis one and Genesis two, created out of nothing. In this beautiful poetic way. And the crowning achievement is man. The human person. Made male and females. This is Genesis 1:27. He says, "***Let us make man in our own image. After our own likeness,***" God says. In his image and likeness he created them. Man and woman he made them. And he blessed them. And he said, "***Be fruitful and multiply.***"

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Now the key in that poetic knowledge is that we're not just a creature. We're not just a gathering of molecules and atoms. And as somebody said, "We're not just atoms with attitude." Right? We're actually a creation deliberately formed by God, and endowed in that identity with a divine reality; a divine truth of who we are. Now remember, we haven't done anything yet. This is the beauty and the gift of creation itself, made male and female, from the very beginning. So there's an original dignity, and original truth to this. Being called to be fruitful and multiply speaks to the reality of being made male and female. And a particular type of love that has the capacity to create new life. New life not just as a new person, which is amazing, and miraculous, but we come to find out in the encounter of love that love actually builds us up. It edifies us. We have a life that multiplies and grows, the lover who makes the gift of himself, the beloved who receives another as a worthy gift.

It's not until we get into that second creation story again, linked together, in complement. That we get to what we call the subjective view of creation. Man's view to God. The subjects, the people. Engaged. Here it says, "***The Lord God formed from the clay, the dust, the earth, a body, then breathed his spirit into that body.***" And the poet says, "Man became a living being." We take that truth to recognize again that directly from the hands of God we've been created with a great dignity. You follow through the story, which was, you know, spend all kinds of time going through.

But here in the created for joy we see that it's in this subjective creation. God creates man in this time. And as you were, where he has a time. God the Father and the Father has him to exercise his identity as a son. Adam is created and he picks him up, he puts him into this paradise. And has him to exercise a freedom, exercise his will, and really his identity as a son. And he's given a privileged place in this poetry of Genesis two: Privileged above all of creation, to be a steward. And still a son but also a steward.

A steward has a meaning of the one who has been given authority by God. Who is in authority; for us to ensure that everything else in creation can live and flourish. See God is the only author. And he has all authority but he gives it to Adam, to be the steward, to act in his place for the good of creation. That's the truth of fatherhood and authority. Not just creating something to exist on its own. But then to ensuring it's good.

And we see in this story that God gives Adam, man, the human person, this power of life and love, to in the poetry, to tend and till the garden. It's a Hebrew phrase to speak about what we're called to do together. With this power that God has given

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us. That's a stewardship. That's something that's been given to us by the fact of our creation, and also by our receiving that and listening in obedience. That was that naming of the animals.

The second creation story moves us to the relation of being a son before God the father. Coming to know who he is and then recognizing, recognizing. -Knowing again, from the father, that there needs to be another. There needs to be someone to receive and to give in love. And that beautiful poetry is where God takes from the side of Adam, and forms this new creature. He brings this creature to Adam and says, "This one." Adam sings at first sight, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. And I will call her woman for out of man she came."

Now there's some beautiful unpacking in there that we don't have time to do here. But the theology of the body in its great teachings, Saint John Paul the second meditates on this human encounter. But here's the take away. Our creation is deliberately intended from God. And endowed in that creation with some of his most divine gifts. Now all of creation is a sign of God. But not all is the same. Being made male and female by God carries with it a duty, a vocation, a calling. And it's embedded in our identity. And it's meant to be lived through our belonging to God; and whether we understand it or not, whether we recognize it or not, whether we still have the amnesia, and not yet the anamnesis, -the radical remembering, it's still true.

Now we know the story after that in the garden that the fall, or the entrance of sin. But if we move past, move forward, through all the prophets and all of the commands. The commandments and the law, the old covenant, the fulfillment of everything from that fall, and perhaps even earlier, the fulfillment of everything is God himself taking on our flesh. That in the fullness of time, God himself became man, in order then to reveal God to man, and to make man visible and know man to himself.

This is the creation story. This is the radical remembering. I think it was Tertullian, one of the early church Fathers who said, "*That when God first thought man, he thought Christ, not Adam.*" Christ is the fulfillment and the perfection of humanity. And if you want 25 cent words this is what we mean by a Christological anthropology. "Christological anthropology." Anthropos means man. Logos means meaning. And the meaning of man is understood through the meaning of Christ. We speak about the mission of being created for joy and belonging. We need to go no further than gospel of John 15. Which I shared in that first session. And this is where God said through all the commandments *and "If you love me you'll keep*

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my commandments." I have told you all these things, so that my joy might be yours. And that your joy might be complete. Might be full.

So you think, "Will these things mean I don't have anymore rules?" No. The commandments themselves is the obedience and our response that says I am your daughter. I am your son. But it is still all about the joy. The law may keep us alive. But our meaning and purpose of life is to love for joy. Because God is love. And his eternal joy is part of the inheritance that he has for us.

Now I grew up Christian, Catholic. And I grew up with all the stuff and the doctrine, and the dogma and the rules. And I liked the rule. Even the ones that I, you know, God forbid, break. I know they're there and I know that I've broken them. God forbid I don't know what these are and that would be a worse way to live. But I tell you, I have come to love. But before I come to love them I have to know them. You can't love something that you don't know. We need to know the stuff of the faith. But there's a certain pivot, there's a certain change. A certain encounter with Christ that's meant to all of the doctrine alive. And that's what love can do. That's what relation can do. That's what belonging can do.

Now I remember when I first heard about some of these less, more relational things about the faith. About coming to know Jesus Christ. Being transformed by him, To know the person of Christ, getting to know him. And it seemed strange to me because I had related to all of the law and the things we must do, the moral law in particular. But the pivot was coming to see myself even in moments, through God's own eyes. Of his delight in me as a son. And that yes it matters what I do. But we can never be "un-sonned." We can never be "un-daughtered." And when we sin, literally separate ourselves from God. We make the decision to no longer belong to him. And that amnesia from the original sin carries with it even through the actual sin. The darkness of the intellect. That sin, that separation, is what is cosmically obscene. Because no matter what we may think. No matter what we may do. The truth is, we're still sons and daughters of God the father. And belonging to him is everything.

May today be the day where we come to see ourselves more clearly through God's own eyes. To always know where we're from and to whom we belong. We are sons and daughters of God the father. Let us delight in that the way that our father delights in us.