

Human beings have an incredible hunger to belong. We need to know we are loved and connected and a part of something. So, let me ask you this. Would you say: "I GO to St. Paul's Lutheran Church," or would you say: "I BELONG to St. Paul's Lutheran Church"?

Yes, one word makes all the difference. If you say: "I GO," you're telling others that you are more of a casual observer. If you say: "I BELONG," you're invested and connected and an important part of the life and work of this congregation.

Imagine going to a Brewers' game and getting to play ... you wouldn't say: "I GO to the game" anymore. You'd say: "I BELONG to the team!" A football game can also demonstrate this. It's the difference between 60,000 fans desperately needing exercise, watching 22 players desperately needing rest.

Now that we've explained the difference, would you I say: "I GO to the Lord?" Or, would you say: "I BELONG the Lord?" Your answer speaks to your relationship with him. Are you a casual observer of his, or, are you connected to him because he's an important part of your life?

In Isaiah, the Lord gives you 3 powerful reasons why you can say: "**I BELONG TO THE LORD.**" Here are the reasons: **He created me. He redeemed me. He calls me by name.**

(1)

Here's a perfect place to start! You belong to the Lord because he created you and you and you and you as the crown of his creation. You didn't evolve or descend from apes.

That immediately shuts down that ridiculous notion: "*I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want, with whomever I want.*" Besides being sinful, that's incredibly selfish.

How many times haven't you confessed from memory, with fellow Christians: "**I believe in God**

the Father Almighty Maker of heaven and earth"? God created the world and everything in it, this earth and everyone on it.

Besides the miracle of life at conception, and then 9 months later allowing you to arrive screaming and squirming, your Lord's personal care extends to the daily air you breathe, the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the place you call home. You get the picture.

The God to whom you belong didn't just pat you on the behind and say, "*Run along now, you're on your own.*" No, he daily preserves, provides and protects you. That's why you can say with such certainty: I BELONG TO THE LORD! He created me just the way I am, the way he wanted me to be.

(2)

The first two verses of Isaiah 43 are packed-full of the tender words of our God of free and faithful grace. He created your physical life. "*Amazing! Wonderful!*" you say. Absolutely! But what's even more amazing and wonderful: He created your spiritual life, making a saint out of sinner.

We're all guilty of willful and premeditated defiance and disobedience. We're all lawbreakers who deserve the full-force of God's judgment. We're all expecting the announcement of God's punishment, because we're all sinners.

Like Isaiah, we can hope for some kind of escape from his judgment. Wishing it, doesn't make it so. But our God of free and faithful grace, makes an unexpected announcement: Deliverance, "**I have redeemed you.**"

To redeem is to buy back. Redeem implies that someone is hopelessly trapped and unable to gain their own release. That was true of Israel in Egypt. It was true again when they were led off to Babylon as prisoners of war. It remains true for you and me and every sinner.

Recall the familiar words from your Catechism in Confirmation Class? **“He redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil.”** You not only memorized them. You believe them.

I BELONG TO THE LORD because Jesus ransomed me, **not with gold or silver** or unmarked bills, **but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”** No expense was spared. No sacrifice was too great. The Father sent his Son on a rescue and recovery mission to redeem my soul. Jesus paid the debt I owe, because I owed a debt I could never repay. I’m forgiven and acquitted. From death row to fully pardoned.

Can you understand this love? - *It’s beyond comprehension.*
Can you compare this love to anything else? - *It’s incomparable.*
Can you picture this love? - *It’s indescribable.*

None of us can. But the Holy Spirit plants faith in your heart to believe what you can’t comprehend and trust what you can’t describe. That’s why you can be so sure of Jesus’ promise: **“Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.”** Faith is a gift from God, a gift that needs to be valued and maintained. So water it with the Word of God and let it feed on the Lord’s Supper.

I BELONG TO THE LORD – he redeemed me! He ransomed me from those kidnapers: sin, death and the devil.

(3)

There’s a special feeling when someone you look up to and hold in high regard, someone you’d never expect would know you actually calls you by name. The Lord call you by name. That’s another reason why you can say: I BELONG TO THE LORD! With the Lord, you aren’t just a *“Hey you”* or *“What’s your name.”* He has a personal interest and investment with you. You’re his precious treasure.

That didn’t happen because of your hard work or good intentions. You didn’t initiate this

relationship, either. God bought you with the price of the blood of Christ on Calvary. God called you by name when he washed you in the water of your Baptism.

The Lord we belong to doesn’t promise that we’ll escape every difficulty and pass through life without any scrapes or bruises. Water and fire symbolize all the dangers we’ll experience.

But, the Lord does pledge his protection. He delivered his people through the waters of the Red Sea as they exited Egypt. He delivered the three men from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace without even one hair being singed.

- Maybe the Lord delivers you by giving you the strength to keep going.
- Maybe the Lord delivers you by giving you a complete rescue or a miraculous healing.
- Maybe he delivers you by taking you home to heaven, because a temporary loss on this earth is your eternal victory in heaven.

No matter how he works, God’s got this. He makes it personal. Did you notice how often he uses the pronoun *“I”* in these 2 verses? He wants nothing more than for you to know and say with confidence:

I BELONG TO THE LORD!

And you can, because he created and redeemed me. He even calls me by name!