

"We belong to the light, we belong to the thunder, we belong to the sound of the words we've all fallen under. Whatever we deny or embrace for worse or for better; we belong, we belong, we belong together."

In 1984 those words were made famous by Pat Benetar. - I know that this rendition of the song "We Belong" was heard all over the world. It actually reached #3 on Billboard's Top Rock Tracks; it made the Charts in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada. It was a world-wide hit...

I'm going to go out on a limb here, and I'm going to say that the whole idea behind those words "we belong together" were not original to Pat Benetar OR to 1984... These words were a hit long before the birth of even before our oldest member, Marion, who will be 101 this year... Hear these words from Psalm 100 - "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his..." (Psalm 100:3) WE are his, all of us together... It is estimated that Psalm 100 was written around the year 1004... BC - 1000 years before Christ was born. That makes it about 3020 years ago...

If that's too long ago to be a reality for you, let's go ahead and shift to the New Testament readings. Here we find in Romans chapter 12, "so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:5) This chapter in the book of Romans is estimated to be written somewhere in the mid 50's. NOT the mid 50's like when poodle skirts and bobby socks were popular, that would be the 1950's; I'm talking about the actual 50's like 50 some odd years after Christ was born, so just 30 years shy of 2000 years ago... Still LONG before 1984! I do think it was pretty awesome of a rock star - whether consciously or not - to remind us of this very important part of our Christian heritage.

The heritage that we are witness to here in Paul's letter. Verse 10: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,[a] in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10) He is expressing to all who will hear, that harmony among the members of God's family is what is desired - together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - baptized in the name of Christ. We hear the same message from Paul in his letters to the Galatians: "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28)

Paul's concerns were grounded in the actions of people who were seemingly worshipping someone other than God. Paul was telling the people, the children of God, that they should not be divided but should instead be united in Christ... They belonged together...

Perhaps the distractions, the enticement, the "pull" in other directions was as strong then as it is for us now. Did the people in Corinth live in a similar individually dominated society?

Let's try something here. Close your eyes. Now imagine yourself at some public place you go to at least sort of regularly. It might be the grocery store, or the gas station, school, or even church—wherever. Now while your eyes are closed, use your imagination to look around at all the various people around you. Try to see them in detail... Now think about who they are, how old they are... what other things do you notice about them?

Keeping your eyes closed, I want you to do something else. Ask yourself this: do I consider myself to be one of them, or different from them? Are we neighbors? Are we kin? Are we members of the same community, the same people? Are there people in this place you feel connected to, and others that you feel alienated from? Go even deeper in your thoughts and ask yourself: do we belong together?

You can open your eyes now... I asked you to do this today because I want to point out that even when we don't realize it, our culture has conditioned us to think of ourselves individually. We are trained - intentionally or not - from an early age to view ourselves as isolated individuals living among other isolated individuals. We often find ourselves moving away from other people, sometimes even moving against them. We see people as intrinsically "other" - not as a part of who we are.

What if we could literally stop thinking of ourselves as self-contained individuals and began thinking of ourselves as creatures made for God and for one another; thinking of ourselves as people made to be together, to do life together, to belong together?!? We belong - together!

What is it that we are afraid of that doesn't allow us to belong together as a family of God - that doesn't allow us to belong together - belonging to God?

Learning to belong together in God is not necessarily easy...In belonging together we may have to do some hard work. It doesn't mean that we have to tear down every last brick in the walls we've built in order to maintain our individuality - we don't have to remove all the boundaries and sort of meld into one another becoming one entity. But we do have to learn to make room for each other. It's kind of like merging onto a freeway - if we all keep our eyes open and pay attention, we make room for each other and traffic flows smoothly as though it is a single stream... As though all those cars and trucks actually belong together on that highway. Belonging together allows us to build relationships that are based on trust, not on fear. Trust that the other guy will make room for you, not fear that the other guy might beat you out of something, might "win". That's how it works on the highway - that's how it works in life. We build relationships with each other that are not based on fear of losing something, but instead on trust in the love and transforming power of our God.

I wonder how many of us in this last month have truly felt like we belonged with people, like we were knit together within the fabric of God's creation? The whole concept of being together, of belonging together is something so far from our normal reality that it is difficult for us to even imagine.

"We belong together" - sounds good on the surface, but when we really think about what it means for ALL of us to belong together... Well, I for one can't help but think about all the people who have hurt me, and I wonder, do they belong? What about people who are genuinely offensive? Do we belong together with them? Or the people who want nothing to do with us at all - them too? Yes. Together within the fabric of God's creation, with all that God has created, means those people too.

Paul jumped right into the issue for us. The issue is division. The issue is us and them, left and right, good guys and bad buys. The issue is that the church has begun to reflect society rather than society reflecting the church. Rather than living as an example of what community is supposed to be, we seem to have shifted into the same sort of drawing lines and choosing teams that the rest of our culture seems to thrive upon. "I appeal to you" is a plea that Paul is making to the people of Corinth to stop mimicking society, to stop being followers and become the leaders that God created them to be. He is asking them to stop trying to simply blend in, getting lost in the chaos, and start standing out, shining God's light as a beacon for others to see, for others to follow. This call of Paul to the people of Corinth, would be identical to his call to us were he with us today.

We are all in this together. We have to stop choosing sides, building barriers, creating an us and a them. We belong together with the same mind and the same purpose.

And there's the rub... We don't have the same mind and we don't all agree on everything. Fact is sometimes we wonder if we agree on anything at all... Perhaps Paul is calling for us to secure our focus on a mission that loves God and loves neighbor, period. We hear this in our Gospels don't we? In Mark 12 and Matthew 22 we are offered the same instruction. Here I quote Matthew: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40). We need to secure our focus on a mission that loves God and loves neighbor and quit putting our focus on all that other stuff.

We belong together. "...God has put the body together... so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:24b-25) Taking care of one another takes time, takes effort. In a functional healthy family, we help each family member feel loved, appreciated and complete. In a dysfunctional family it's everyone for themselves. Isn't that the way of the world? Everyone for themselves? But we're not like the world.

If we do as commanded, if we love each other, how can we not be together?

We belong together. It is a reality. It is the truth.

In the words sung by Pat Benetar - whether she knew it or not - we are reminded that we belong to God, in all his glory. When we accept that, we can understand what she sang: "... there's no turning back... We belong to the light, we belong to the thunder; We belong to the sound of the words we've all fallen under. Whatever we deny or embrace for worse or for better; We belong, we belong, we belong together... AMEN