

Ancient Future Mission (Week 4): Come and Belong  
**Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less**



**Ancient Future  
Mission**  
• Go and Be  
• Go and Love  
• Go and Tell  
• Come and Belong

1) The last of four facets to early Christian mission or outreach could be summarized "Come and Belong."

2) These earliest Christians practiced a revolutionary hospitality (see Romans 12.13 and Hebrews 13.1-2a): hospitality literally means to offer familial or brotherly love to those you don't yet know.

3) This was part of Christianity's overall universal moral equity, which simply means that they endeavored to treat and do for outsiders the same way they would insiders (see 1 Thes. 3.12 and 5.15, for example).

4) The church father Origen in the 300s CE described the church's commitment to hospitality as follows: "We are not just to receive the stranger when he comes to us, but actually to inquire after and look carefully for strangers, to pursue them and search them out everywhere."

5) Jesus Himself, of course, was their chief model: He didn't merely do evangelism or meet needs, but offered an intimate kind of table fellowship to sinners and seekers alike (see Luke 14.12-14, Matt. 9.11, Luke 15.1-2, etc.)

6) So be a church that helps others "come and belong," we need to dedicate ourselves to this kind of hospitality: like our predecessors in the faith, we must pursue and prioritize strangers, embrace them like family, treat outsiders as well as we do insiders, make room in our lives for those others might exclude, and ultimately welcome others like God welcomes us.

7) There is a real cost to not being intentional about this kind of hospitality: as Brad Brisco and Lance Ford write in *Missional Essentials*: "Unless we find a way to open ourselves to others, we will be the ones to grow more isolated and frightened. Hospitality is the answer to hostility. Jesus said "love your neighbor"; hospitality is how."

8) In their recent book, "The Great Dechurching," Jim Davis and Michael Graham describe what Christian hospitality looks like in 21st-century America, and how we might embody that as a church family: "We learn in...we listen. We validate where we can validate. We challenge people not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We bring them back to the authentic Jesus. Above all...may the heart and head go hand in hand, where the love of God and pursuit of truth join forces in the formation of men and women..."

## More to Explore

1) If you're interested in early Christian distinctiveness and mission in the wider Greco-Roman world, we'd recommend these resources:

- [Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World: Sittser, Gerald L.](#)
- [Larry Hurtado, A New and Mischievous Superstition: Early Christianity in the Roman World](#)
- [Why Christianity Was Different from Other Religions in Ancient Rome](#)
- [The Distinctiveness of Early Christianity](#)

2) More on Christian hospitality, in both church life and your individual lives too:

- [Hospitality in the Early Christian World: Amy Oden](#)
- [10 Things You Should Know about Christian Hospitality](#)
- [Spiritual Disciplines—On Hospitality](#)
- [How to Change the World with Christian Hospitality](#)
- [Jesus is Our Example of Christian Hospitality](#)

3) On how churches can help outsiders come and belong:

- [Should We Invite People to Belong Before they Believe?](#)
- [Five reasons to let people belong before they believe](#)
- [Seeking the Seekers: It's worth the risks](#)

## A Prayer for the Week

From The Church of England Liturgical Commission:

Loving God, we pray that this church may be a place of welcome, safety and compassion. Keep us watchful and caring, trusting beyond our own fear and anxiety, that all who worship here may know that they are loved, by You and by us. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

## Committed to Being a Safe Spiritual Place

This is a reprint of the commitment that was part of our worship service yesterday - worth reviewing from time to time, and certainly something we can aspire to together...

The Church of England Liturgical Commission:

May the doors of this church be wide enough to receive all who come seeking God and our fellowship.

May the doors of this church be narrow enough to shut out pettiness, pride, and the hostility that poisons our culture.

May the threshold of this church be no stumbling block to anyone who seeks God's love among us.

May the threshold of this church be too high to admit complacency and self-seeking.

May the heart of this church be closed to no one, may the eyes of this church see those who are overlooked, and may the arms of this church embrace all who come.

May this church be, for all who enter, a safe place and the doorway to life in Christ, amen.