

# What It Means To Belong To St Johns 1981

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[ 0 : 00 ] Here you have page 154 ready to go. I ran into a very peculiar situation this week. Early in the week, in fact on Monday morning when I was walking quietly and meditatively as ministers should do, from the parish hall over to the church I was suddenly confronted by a great loud voice and it belonged, as I found, to a very small man indeed who said that his name was Mr. Blimpkin and that he was very seriously thinking of joining St.

John's Church, but he wanted to know what it was all about. And I said, well, where do you live? And he said he lived in a chestnut and it was about that big, he said, only he said, you know, I mean, he had to point with his walking stick to show how high it went up. And he said he had a very nice three-bedroom house with a garden and a hedge all about it. And I said, you sound as though you're the kind of person we want. And so, I said, if you want to know what it's all about, the thing for you to do is come to the Monday Church Club tonight and you will see.

Well, I came to the Monday Church Club that night and we had a lovely service and beautiful singing and everything went so wonderfully it was hard to believe. And I thought, now, I don't know where Mr. Blimpkin is, but undoubtedly he's here somewhere and I'll see him in the morning and find out what he thinks of St. John's.

He said to me in the morning, oh, I see, it's people who get together for macaroni and ice cream. That's what we had for supper at the Monday Church Club.

[ 1 : 57 ] Well, I said, no, you've missed the point. But if you want to really meet what St. John's is all about in essence, be here for breakfast tomorrow morning in the kitchen.

And so, we went in the morning and we had breakfast together and then we had a Bible study in the Gospel according to St. Mark and it was a very lively and animated Bible study. And I said to Mr. Blimpkin when I met him almost at noon on Tuesday, I said, well, now you know what St. John's is all about?

He said, yes, hot muffins and homemade jam. Well, I told him, no, no, no, no, no, no. Didn't you? But he didn't. So, there was no use trying to explain because that's all he saw.

So, I said, well, now this afternoon the trustees are meeting and they're going down to Rosemary Heights and they're going to have a conference and they're going to discuss all about what's happening at St. John's.

So, if you'll come there, then you'll see. Now, I didn't see him there, but I gathered from conversation subsequently that he had been there. And he said, when I talked to him the next morning, very noncommittal, he said, I noticed you had macaroni for supper again.

[ 3 : 13 ] So, I began to think that maybe he was only interested in what we ate. So, I said, well, tomorrow night there's going to be a gathering and they're going to have communion together in the chapel and then they go for supper.

But I think if you come, you'll find them really telling you. Just by being with them, you'll know what St. John's is all about. Because of their relationship one to another.

So, I guess he was there, but on Thursday morning he said to me, I see you had Boorst and salad. Another supper party.

I said, well, no, you missed the point. That was only part of it. There was something else going on there. Why don't you come tonight to the sidesman's dinner?

And then you'll know how the church really works. And at the sidesman's dinner, all the sidesmans were there. Young ones and old ones. I guess not all of them were there, but a good many of them were there.

[ 4 : 18 ] And they talked about the early days at St. John's when there used to be just a rectory which stood out here and the Sunday school which started in the basement of Bishop de Poncier's house.

And then how there were Saturday night dances. And then how there was a new parish hall and a new church. And how all the things had gone on at St. John's. And you couldn't help but find out what a wonderful thing has been happening here at St. John's for 50 years.

And so I said to Mr. Blimpkin in the morning, well, now do you understand? And he said, yes, it's roast beef and red wine that you all like. So I wasn't getting very far.

So I said, well, try Friday night. Friday night we had a supper. Unfortunately, that's what it was. And I knew at the beginning that we were going to be in trouble. And it was just for the people who had been going to go on the family weekend.

And they all were going to go. And there wasn't enough of them registered. So as a consolation prize, we had supper together on Friday night. We barbecued hamburger.

[ 5 : 30 ] And yes, there was very nice people there. And they seemed to get along very well with one another and have a good relationship to one another. But of course, all that Mr. Blimpkin saw was hamburgers and strawberry shortcomings.

And he thought he'd found the secret. I said, well, you've only got one day left, I was told. So I said to Mr. Blimpkin, well, if you'll come tomorrow, there's going to be a wedding at St. John's.

And that will tell you what St. John's is all about. And so he must have come. And there was limousines out there. And there was flowers up to here.

And there was candles down the aisle. And the organ and the choir. Everything was here that could make the most superb wedding you ever imagined. And there were seven groomsmen there.

And seven maids of honor there. And the whole thing was magnificent in the extreme. And then we went to a reception. And I was afraid of that.

[ 6 : 30 ] And so when I spoke to Mr. Blimpkin late last night, he said, I know what it's all about. Smoked salmon, brown bread, and champagne.

Well, I said, I'm sorry. I guess you haven't really understood St. John's at all. And I said, supposing you come tomorrow morning. And you ask somebody that there, what St. John's is all about.

And then they will tell you. And then you will know. Because I haven't been able to do it. So as one of you moves, probably across to the coffee hour this morning, you will be confronted by the question.

What is St. John's all about? And I want you to be ready with the answer. And this is the answer. Now turn to page 154.

And it's the first six verses of chapter 15 of Romans. And it says, first, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

[ 7 : 49 ] Now, what had happened, you see, to that church, and what sometimes happens to a church like St. John's, is that there are some people who consider themselves very strong.

And there are other people who, well, they have a lot of questions and a lot of doubts and a lot of difficulties. And they're not really getting along very well with the Christian faith. And they don't seem to understand it.

And, of course, they're weak. And so the strong ones all get together. And they do the strong and exciting things. And the weak ones seem to get a little bit weaker because of that.

And they trail further and further behind. And that's not what the church is all about. Christ says, and Paul tells us, it's a matter of the strong identifying with the weak.

So you can't tell who's strong and who's weak. Because all of us are weak. And we very much need the strength of somebody to help us.

[ 8 : 49 ] And even if we're strong in certain areas, there are areas where we're not very strong. And we need, Paul says, to identify with the weak. So that one of the things that's characteristic of St. John's is that the strong are going to identify with the weakness of the weak.

So that when you see them, they'll all appear to be weak to you. And you probably won't think too much of them. But nevertheless, that's who they are.

And they're not pleasing themselves. Because if they were pleasing themselves, they would go on just being with the strong people who were going ahead and who were aggressive and really knew what it was to be a Christian.

And they were forgetting the people who weren't. And that's not the kind of church we are. And the reason we're not that kind of church, if you look again in the text, you'll find out why. Because it says, and I want you to be careful to notice this, that we are to live in harmony with one another and in accord with Christ Jesus.

And living in harmony with one another is for the strong to put up with the weakness of the not strong. And the other thing that you're to do is you're not to please yourself, but you're to do good to your neighbor.

[10:13] And that is, you're not trying to keep up with him and you're not trying to pass him, but you're trying to build him up spiritually. So that you're not so concerned about your own spiritual life that you go ahead like an astronaut into the outer space of spiritual experience, but that you're concerned for your neighbor and you want to do good to him and you want to help him and you want to identify with him and you want to build him up.

Because that's the way the church builds itself up is when people don't try to please themselves, but try to do good to their neighbor. Oh.

Well then. Me, and that comes from Psalm 69. And it says that Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, then it's that piece from Psalm 69.

And if you read it over two or three times, you'll find it's a little bit complicated trying to understand it. But what it means is that when Jesus came, he went among the people who were insulted and the people who were scorned and the people that nobody liked.

And the result of him doing that, rather than seeking his own good against his neighbor, or rather than moving with the strong because he was strong, he went with those who were scorned and those who were rebuked and those who were reproached.

[11:48] Do you know what happened? They reproached him. So that he became the man who was despised and rejected. And he went among those that were insulted, so they insulted him.

But he identified with those people. He lived in harmony with them. And he didn't set out to please himself. And if you read these verses carefully, you'll see that pleasing yourself is not part of what it means to be a Christian.

But if you're strong, you're to bear with those who are weak, and you're to seek not your own good, but the good of your neighbor, and you're willing to identify with those who are scorned and those who are reproached and those who are insulted because Christ did.

Anybody want to join St. John? Well, you might think at first, well, what's the use of joining a bunch of losers? Because that's what it looks like when you see this.

Every other society and group we belong to, the strong try and identify with the strong and forget that there are such people as the weak. And so you might say, well, if that's what I belong to, I'm going to soon become depressed because weak people discourage me, and I'm soon going to become not only discouraged, I'm going to lose hope, and I'm going to shake.

[13:23] I'm not going to be able to stand it. And yet, that's what I'm supposed to do. That's what belonging to St. John's really means.

And it isn't smoked salmon and brown bread, and it isn't roast beef and wine, and it isn't even macaroni and ice cream. It's something to do with our relationship to one another.

And in that relationship with one another, that those who are strong are to be with the weak, and that sounds pretty hard because you've got to get ahead in this world, and that ain't the way to do it. And you've got to do good to your neighbor, and as it is, I'm doing a little better than my neighbor right now, and I want to do a lot better than him in the end. And as for the reproached and the scornful, I try and pretend they don't exist, then how can I identify with them?

Because what will people think of me? They won't understand me. Well, Paul says, yeah, you'll get into that kind of problem, and so there's an answer for it.

[14:28] And the answer for it is there in verse 4. Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

So, that's it, you see. These people living in harmony one with another, their steadfastness and their hope and their encouragement doesn't come from the fact that they're moving among the fastest crowd in this town and they know how to get along, or that they're moving with the people who are really doing well, but their steadfastness and their encouragement and their hope comes from the Scriptures.

And reading those is what gives it to them, what gives them a place to stand, that steadfastness, and what encourages them so that they keep on going, and what gives them hope even when everything around them seems to be hopeless.

Can I interrupt with a short commercial? Here it is. At the back of the church today, there are Bible reading booklets provided by the Scripture Union.

And if you're very small and can't read it by yourself, but your mother and dad have to read it to you, you get them to buy quest notes for you. And if you're at the place where you can read by yourself and you can answer puzzles and you can work out programs, then you can go and order keynotes.

[16:07] And then if you're a little bit older, like a teenager or an adult who likes a fairly simple, direct, daily Bible reading, then you could go and get daily bread.

And if you're getting along pretty well and got to know quite a lot and have been at it for a while, then you'll find that there are daily notes. And these are for every day of the year.

And they're given out once every quarter. And if you were thinking even, and this does sound crassly commercial, but if you were thinking of getting them for somebody, like grandparents for grandchildren or parents for children or children for parents or anything like that, if you ordered now, their first book would be here for them on time for Christmas.

I hate to remind you, but it's all there. And that's because there is a practical necessity to be involved in reading the Scripture.

Because that's where the encouragement comes from and that's where the hope comes from and that's where the steadfastness comes from. And that's what we want to be as a congregation.

[17:27] And somehow, Mr. Blimpkin, who will undoubtedly question one of you very carefully about this, and you must know the answer, that the strong bear with the weakness of the weak, that everybody, rather than pleasing himself, is out to please his neighbor, to do good to his neighbor, and to build his neighbor up in the faith of Christ, and that the encouragement comes from the Scripture.

That's why we're always having Bible readings and Bible studies and Bible discussions, but that's because it's the very source of life for us as a community.

And then, do you know what I want you to do? And with this, we're finished. Turn to page 154 again. And if you look at verse 5 of chapter 15, you'll see that Paul, after telling them all this, suddenly starts praying.

And verse 5 is a prayer. So I want us all to say it together. And I want us to say it in such a way that where it says, you, as Paul was praying for you, that we may say, we.

And that comes in the second, that comes in the second line and in the next to last line. And where it says, you, we'll say, we.

[19:08] So could we all kneel down and be quiet for a moment? Amen. Amen. When we say this prayer together, reading it together, can we pray that it might really be true about St. John's and about what St. John's is all about?

chapter 15 and verse 5. Together, may the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant us to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.