

<sup>16</sup>We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup>How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. <sup>19</sup>And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him <sup>20</sup>whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; <sup>22</sup>and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

<sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

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I’m going to sing the melody from a television show’s theme song. If you know the words, say them when it’s time. If you don’t recognize the song,... this will be over in 30 seconds. [Sing the melody from the Bluey theme.] “Mom! ... Dad! ... Bingo! ... Bluey!” Yes, the hit show Bluey, streaming on Disney Plus. If I were to say it is merely a cartoon about anthropomorphic dogs, it would be an injustice. Bluey is about the life of the Heeler family, and it focuses on the playful imaginations of the seven-year old child Bluey and her younger sister Bingo, who is five.

Children love the show, but if you are an adult and have seen Bluey, you know that it will tug at your heart. That’s because this show doesn’t shy away from addressing the big emotions that we sometimes have in life, as children and as adults.

A week or two ago some new episodes were released. I was not prepared for the reveal at the end of the season’s final episode. The camera zooms out from the Heeler house and there is now a “For Sale” sign planted in the yard. It stirred a lot within me, to be honest. I moved twice when I was a kid, and both were within the span of one year. I recall striving for a sense of belonging in

each community. I wondered how Bluey and Bingo would handle this change. Will Bluey and Bingo go through those same big emotions that I went through? What would happen to all the friends that they've made? Days after releasing that season finale, the creators released an extra-long special episode that addresses the "For Sale" sign. I won't spoil that extended episode for you.

In our second lesson, from the letter called 1 John, the writer addresses concerns within his community. Namely, their question of how they can know that as followers of Jesus that they "belong to the truth." There were many competing philosophies at that time in the broader Roman society. Even within 1st Century Judaism, there was a lot of diversity, and this Christian sect was the new kid on the block. Many people were skeptical of it. Would it fit in with others? Would it make any friends? Okay, maybe Christianity wasn't exactly like a kid who just moved to a new town, but it seems that within the 1 John community there were questions about belonging: "By what basis can we claim that our proclamation is rooted in the truth?" "How do we know that we are following God and Jesus correctly?"

The writer responds by saying we belong to the truth because who we are is rooted in love; not in word or speech, but in truth and action. The writer argues that the truth of God is love. So when our lives are defined foremost by the love that we share and embody, we are living out the truth of God. That is how we know that we belong.

Throughout our lives, humans ask questions about whether or not we belong. Childhood and adolescence are probably when questions of belonging weigh the most on us. When my family made those two moves, we ended up back in the same broad community where we had begun. However, we now lived in a new school district, so new friends were still in order. Yet, we were able to return to the church where we had previously attended. Even though everything else in my life was unsettled due to all the moving, the people let me know that I was welcomed in that church, and that I belonged there. That sense of belonging went a long way in helping me navigate all the big emotions.

The start of this year marked the beginning of our goals at All Saints for the next five years. One of the goals was to study and make steps to further our ministry with Children and Youth. The goal states, "We will support and grow our impact with children and youth, both within and beyond

our church membership.” The leadership of this congregation wants us all to think about ministry for and with children and youth. In addition, in two weeks we will have our annual Youth Sunday. So today and next week we will have some directed conversations to help us prepare for that special day. You should have received two cards when you entered this morning, each with two questions. We are going to start with the green card. Like we’ve done before, in our pews we form groups of 2 to 4 people. We are going to take five minutes to write down our responses to the questions on the green card and discuss them within those small groups. I’ll give you a minute warning, and then we will move on to the yellow cards. At the end, we will collect the cards so that the Council can review the responses.

- What are your earliest memories of church?
- Why do children belong in church? Youth?
- What unique challenges might young people be facing today?  
How can the church help?
- What role do/might you have in Children & Youth Ministry?

I hope that was a fulfilling exercise for us all. Perhaps it stirred some memories and inspired you to think of how God is at work with the children and youth of this congregation. Let us pray. Gracious God, you love us more than we can imagine. Help us to live in this love and to embody this love. Thank you for the children and youth of this congregation, and stir us to see how you are doing amazing things in their lives today. May they come to know All Saints as a place where they can always belong. Amen.