

Jeff's Jottings

This Is It! (Mallory, Part IV)

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By Jeff Japinga
Executive Presbyterian

For a while, Mallory wondered if she'd simply misread that strange sense inside of her — that sense of longing for something she could actually believe in that could give her some stability and rootedness. Somewhere that could help her ask the pressing questions of her life? She'd thought that place could be church, a place she'd known in her past. But the church of the present hadn't seemed to quite live up to the longings she had.

So she'd tried a few places on a few Sunday mornings. Deep down, Mallory knew that these brief, episodic encounters probably weren't entirely fair to the church, but she wasn't quite sure how else to do it. Even what it meant to belong seemed to elude her, if only because so little in her life really was about belonging. A place to belong. A place for her to belong, and not some made-up version of herself that seemed acceptable.

She'd about given up, to be truthful, until she met Alisha at lunch one day. In talking, Mallory discovered that she and Alisha had been on similar frustrating quests that revolved around meaning and belonging and church. "You know what I've decided I'm looking for," Alisha said. "A group of people to live life with, who share openly their search for God and allow anyone, regardless of knowledge or past behavior, to seek with them, and who collectively live by the belief that their calling is to make this world look a little more like heaven each day. That's what I'm looking for."

"Are there really churches like that?" Mallory asked.

That's our question as congregations, isn't it. Are we a church who presents a message and image of a faith community that is clear and compelling? Who

can identify something in our life that is so true and so urgent that people will change their weekend plans to be there? Who, in fact, offers to the Mallorys of this world something that will make a difference in their lives, not just in our offering plate.

The quest for belonging has become more urgent in our age, but it's not just belonging to say one belongs (as it often was in previous generations). It's a dynamic quest, a voyage of discovery, where every corner may reveal something new — even as it is grounded in something foundational and firm. There is active interplay between belief and practice, and practice and belief, with no presumption of which should come first. There's space and opportunity for spiritual discovery; for worship and prayer; for study and discussion; for service and practical response to human need.

In short, Mallory's quest (Alisha's, too) was for a congregation with a vocation in the world — an identity, a way of being, a calling. She found one, too, in a dated, 1950s-style building in an unassuming neighborhood that looked like so many others, but housed people who embraced her, and the community around them, like none she had met before.

This is it! Mallory knew. And so it has been.

*How clear is our vocation, Lord,
When once we heed your call:
To live according to your word,
And daily learn, refreshed, restored,
That you are Lord of all,
and will not let us fall.*