

# **Jeff's Jottings**

## *Dear Mallory,*

November 9, 2018

By Jeff Japinga  
Executive Presbyter

For a few weeks, I've been telling your story to our folks here in the presbytery, of seeking out a church after so many years away. I so admire your courage and perseverance, and for paying attention to that yearning somewhere deep inside of you. Thanks for letting us walk a bit of that journey with you.

I was supposed to tell part four of that story last Friday, but I didn't. People who read Jottings regularly know I was back in Michigan with family, following the death of my dad.

I could have done that today, but instead decided to wait until next week to continue your story with the Presbytery, and instead name a bit of my own experience to you. Because I think it connects to your search.

You've talked a lot about feeling alone in this world, a million friends but no home. You've found places where people know your name, to be sure: the jazz gathering on Tuesdays at the bar down the street, your yoga class. Even, in some strange way, you've experienced a sense of community at the Vikings game, or the political rally on Tuesday night, the cheering and pulling for the same thing. And you've appreciated all that, I know.

But what I've heard you longing for is not so much community, these gatherings of like-minded people, but connection — what the writer Brené Brown defines as “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” It's more than just the occasional episode, or liking the same thing that brought you

together. It's a commitment, not to the schedule or the event but to particular people. To belonging.

That's a part of what I've experienced the past week. When my dad died last Thursday, I felt an aloneness similar to what you described when your uncle and cousin were killed in the car accident a few years ago. This week, my church didn't let me stay in that lonely place. Through their words and their presence, I have had a constant companion. They told me stories of my dad and assured me that they were praying for me. And I think there's nothing more profound than being prayed for. I remembered again: we are a people who belong, to God and to each other, a deep commitment we share with each other because of our common commitment to Jesus.

I think that's what I've heard you say you've been searching for, too, the place of connection and commitment. I know there are other places you might find it, but the church at its best is the best place I know. (And when it forgets, and we too often do, well, it's pretty bad.) The other night on Facebook, I wrote this: "Tonight I am grateful beyond what any words can express, for an incredible family, for colleagues and friends, for the church and its people. The way you have all stepped in with your love and prayers, and with your stories, serious and funny, about my dad, has buoyed and sustained me in these days. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

I thought you might want to know that, Mallory — though I think you're learning that on your own. But that's a story for next week.