



WELCOME TO THE
**COMPASSION
BEAT**
we're so glad you're here!

Belonging Vs. Fitting In

Recently, I have been reflecting on the topic of belonging. I believe it is one of the deepest longings of the human soul. We all desire to be accepted and valued for who we truly are. Nevertheless, I was startled when I read a quote by Brené Brown:

“Fitting in is one of the greatest barriers to belonging. Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be in order to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.”

I have continued to ponder the wisdom in Brown’s research. How much time and energy do we spend trying to fit in? Brown suggests that fitting in actually harms our souls. In contrast, belonging brings healing. True belonging begins within. We cannot show up authentically in our relationships if we do not know who we are — what we value, what we believe, and what matters most to us.

Unfortunately, the desire to fit in often leads to people-pleasing. Our efforts to meet others’ expectations may even be praised, reinforcing the behavior and creating a subtle but powerful cycle. We begin to wear a mask, stepping into roles others define for us. Life becomes performance — a constant striving for approval on someone else’s terms.

The cost of selling our authentic selves is high. It leaves us feeling empty and disconnected. It can be both frightening and overwhelming to realize that we have shaped our lives around others’ expectations while neglecting our own souls.

Ultimately, true belonging is found in becoming who God created us to be. It requires honesty — with ourselves and with God. This is not a quick or easy process; it does not happen overnight. But it is sacred work, and it is worth it. As we courageously seek our true identity, we can trust that God will meet us on the journey toward belonging.

The Goodness of God

I never cease to be amazed at the goodness of God. The ways God shows up in ordinary life continues to surprise and bless me.

On February 17, I was invited to speak about The Compassionate Way at Hope Presbyterian Church in Spicer. It was especially meaningful because I previously served as their pastor.

After the event, Doug and I began the drive back to Little Falls. Along the way, I asked if we could stop at Dollar General in Paynesville. As we passed Kwik Trip, I mentioned that I was getting hungry and could use some water and a bite to eat. Doug noticed yogurt inside Dollar General and kindly suggested it. I declined the healthy option and decided I would grab a slice of pizza at Casey's instead.

As I approached the entrance, I noticed the clerk bouncing a ball behind the counter. I remember thinking how refreshing it was to see someone enjoying their work. I selected a slice of pizza and a bottle of water and headed to the register.

The clerk looked at me and asked, "Do you lead Compassion Circles?"

I paused and answered, "Yes."

She continued, "At Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge?"

Again, I said, "Yes."

She smiled and said, "I was there over a year ago. I was pregnant at the time."

My heart filled with joy. I asked how she was doing, and she shared that she was doing well—and that her daughter is now 13 months old.

It was a holy moment.

What were the chances that I would randomly stop in a small town for a slice of pizza and encounter someone whose life had intersected with this ministry? It felt like more than coincidence. It felt like a gentle reminder from God: I am at work. Seeds are growing. Lives are being transformed.

In that simple exchange at a convenience store counter, I felt showered in God's goodness and love. Sometimes the goodness of God meets us in sanctuaries. And sometimes it meets us over a slice of pizza.



What Divides Us

Did you know that parts of the media industry profit from our division? According to the Media Foundation, “content that provokes strong emotional reactions — including anger, fear, or outrage — tends to keep users engaged longer. This creates an economic incentive for platforms to promote divisive or sensational content because it boosts profit.”

When outrage becomes profitable, it can begin to feel as though there is no middle ground — no shared space where thoughtful conversation can occur. The loudest voices rise to the top, and nuance gets lost in the noise.

Yet I believe something different is possible. I believe that if we sit down and hear one another's stories we would not only understand one another better, but we would also not be as divided. Listening does not require agreement. It requires humility and curiosity. And those qualities have the power to soften division.

In high school, I participated in the speech category called Discussion. It was not debate. We were given a situation and, using research and respectful dialogue, worked together to reach a solution.

I find myself weary of debates where it seems no one is really listening. What if we shifted from trying to defeat one another to seeking the common good? What if we valued shared solutions more than individual victories? It is time for us to come together — not in uniformity, but in mutual respect — and work for the good of one another.



Important Notice Regarding Contributions

We have recently been informed that the bank will NO longer accept checks addressed to The Compassionate Way. Instead, checks must be made out to **Lakes Area Presbyterian Church**, which currently acts as our fiscal sponsor. When sending a check, please indicate "For The Compassionate Way" on the memo line. We regret any confusion or inconvenience this change may cause.

Thank you once again to everyone who has generously supported our ministry efforts. Checks can still be mailed to The Compassionate Way at 7761 Excelsior Rd., Baxter, MN 56425. Or you may contribute online at <https://lpchurchbaxter.org/give-on-line-here/>.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 320-905-5453.

[HTTPS://WWW.THE-COMPASSIONATE-WAY.ORG/](https://www.the-compassionate-way.org/)