

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Acts 2:42. Loneliness affects all of us at different levels and for different reasons. One way to combat loneliness is to model the practices of the early church. We notice in verse 42 that one of the key disciplines of the early church was prayer. Someone once said that “a true friend is someone who asks how you are, and then sticks around long enough to hear the answer. A true friend knows your deepest and darkest secrets and loves you anyway.” Christ is such a friend. If you are lonely, try praying to Christ. He is there and will never leave you alone.

Tuesday – Read Acts 2:46. One of the things we notice in this verse is that the early church often met in small groups and shared fellowship and meals. One of the remedies to loneliness is to get involved in a small group or Sunday school at church. There is a reason why John Wesley was adamant that laity meet together in “classes” and “societies” (what we know as small groups). Small groups provide deeper connections with others and accountability for our faith journey. We cannot walk with Christ without the support of the church. If you are lonely, have you tried joining at small group at PCC?

Wednesday – We read in verse 46 that the early church continued to meet regularly in the temple courts to praise God. The corporate worship of God is an essential practice for those seeking to grow in the faith. It is also not a bad way to combat loneliness. When we worship God together we are reminded that we are a part of a larger community of faith. The people worshipping with us also feel lonely and have the same struggles and joys that we have. Corporate worship reminds us of our connectedness in God. If you are lonely, one of the best things you can do is to attend worship on a regular basis.

Thursday – Read Acts 2:44-45. It is clear that the early communities of faith were generous. They had God’s generous spirit in their hearts. They served each other. You want to know the silver bullet to loneliness? Reach out to another lonely person and serve them. So often when we are lonely we feel that no one cares or understands our struggles. What a gift you could be to another lonely person as you offer your care and understanding. All of us can be “wounded healers.” Take a look around the sanctuary on Sunday. I’m willing to bet there are lonely people around you. Why not reach out to them?

Friday – Read Acts 2:47. There is a reason why the church attracted so many followers. The true cure to loneliness is fellowship with God and God’s people.



PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

a United Methodist Congregation

227 - 70th Street South ~ St Petersburg, FL 33707
(727) 381-2499 email: pasadena@pccumc.org
www.pasadenacommunitychurch.org

Pasadena Community Church

Always Look for the Rainbow

~ Loneliness ~

Sunday, January 15, 2012

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: John 13: 31-35

One of the worst feelings in the world is loneliness. It feels like something is gnawing deep within us. It takes the joy and spark out of life.

I recall speaking with a lady in another church I served. She was very unhappy and could not figure out why. She made a few appointments with me and we talked about it. One day she came in and said, “I have figured it out. At first I thought I was hungry. Then I thought I was bored. Then I thought I was angry. But then I figured it out. I am lonely. I don’t have anyone to truly love and I don’t feel that anyone really notices me or understands me. I would give anything just to hear someone say, ‘You are important to me.’”

There is nothing more debilitating than loneliness. There is no feeling quite like it. The truth is all of us suffer from loneliness at one level or another. Did you know that 22% of Americans ate dinner alone last night? And a recent Gallup poll stated that three out of ten Americans feel lonely. What’s more is that many people seek psychiatric help because of feelings associated with loneliness. And loneliness is one of the top two contributing factors of suicide (James Merritt, “Are You Lonesome Tonight?”).

You know what loneliness is? Loneliness is a half empty bed because your spouse has left you. Loneliness is a home that is quiet because all of the kids have moved out and your spouse has died. Loneliness is an email inbox only filled with spam because no one writes you anymore. Loneliness is a phone that never rings because no one calls anymore. Loneliness is eating your dinner over the kitchen sink because there is no one to share it with.

There is no feeling quite like loneliness because we all want people to know we are here and to care that we are here. Sigmund Freud once told the story of a school boy who was expelled from

school for misbehaving. He stood outside the class room and threw pebbles against the windows. Finally, the principal went outside and confronted the boy and said, “Why are you throwing pebbles against the windows?” The little boy said, “I just wanted everyone to know that I am still here” (Merritt). I believe all of us carry pebbles in our pockets. We all deeply desire for people to know that we are still here and that we matter.

The reason why loneliness is such an awful feeling is because God made us for relationships. God made us to need each other. God made us to be in relationship with him and to be in relationship with others. When that fundamental God given desire is not met, we feel lonely. This is why God said in the creation story, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). When God made the world he called just about everything good. The only thing God said was not good was loneliness. Theologians have said for years that God created us because God did not want to be alone. It is in our spiritual DNA to be in relationships. It is our soul desire to love and be loved.

So, what do we do when the dark clouds of loneliness come in? We look for the rainbow!

The Rainbow of Jesus’ Friendship

When we are lonely, there is always the rainbow of Jesus’ friendship. I love the words to the old hymn, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief’s to bear!” My favorite line to that hymn is, “What peace we often forfeit, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to the Lord in prayer.”

Someone once said that “Friends are those rare people who come in when the rest of the world is going out. Friends are the people who ask how you are, and then stick around long enough to hear the

answer. Friends know your deepest and darkest secrets and love you anyway.”

Now, this sounds nice, but the truth is no human being can live up to those words all the time. No person can fill the hole in our souls. No person can fulfill all of our desires. No person can be all things to us all the time. But you know who can? Jesus Christ!

Howard Olds put it this way, “Only Christ can love us with no strings attached. Only Christ can forgive us freely and completely. Only Christ can relieve the homesickness of the soul that longs for something more.” He is right. Only the companionship of Christ can truly satisfy us.

Perhaps there are some of you here who have felt lonely all of your life because you have tried to find people to fill the void within you. You go to parties. You surround yourself with people, but you still feel lonely. You want to know why? Because there is a God-shaped void within you that only God can fill. Why not try the friendship of Christ? He is always ready to offer his friendship. Simply pray, “Lord, I need you in my life. Come into my heart and forgive me and renew me. I can’t do life without you.”

I love the Upper Room devotional. I try to read it every day. The messages are simple, but inspiring. A few years back there was a touching devotional written by Louise Kilpatrick. Louise described herself as a 30-year-old widow and mother of two boys ages 2 and 5. She writes, “My five-year-old wanted to go play at the park. My soul was aching from having lost my husband 3 months ago, but reluctantly I said, ‘Ok, let’s go.’ As we walked in the park we paused by a beautiful, blooming bush. After a while, Terry looked up at me and said, ‘Momma, don’t worry. We’ll be happy again someday.’ As he squeezed my hand I realized his words were true. In my sorrow I had forgotten God. It took a child to remind me that God does not abandon his own.”

You see, the Lord touches us in places where human beings cannot. This is what the old hymn “In the Garden” expresses:

**“And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.”**

Are you lonely? You want someone to understand you? Do you desire connection and love? Let Jesus be your friend. He cares about you and understands you. Most of all, he loves you more than

you can imagine.

The Rainbow of Understanding

One of the biggest causes of loneliness is the feeling that no one really understands us and the struggles we go through. So often in life when we go through difficulty we mistakenly believe we are the only people on earth who feel like we feel. Ever felt that way?

Sometimes people who feel this way will come talk to me. And when I tell them that I have been through the same struggles and often feel the same way they feel, much of the heaviness they carry is lifted. I can see some light in their eyes. There is a healing that comes when we feel understood – when we no longer feel all alone with our struggles.

This healing of understanding should teach us something. We are not the only ones who struggle with loneliness. There are people in our lives right now who need the healing that comes from our understanding. They are behind the counter at the grocery store. They are sitting next to you in worship. They are in your Sunday school class. They live next door to you. They are in the car next to you in traffic. They are in the office next to you at work. They feel lonely too. And they think like you do. They think they are alone and that no one would understand them.

You want to know the silver bullet to loneliness? It is reaching out to others and being a friend to them by offering your understanding. Oh, how people long for understanding. Someone once said that “Loneliness is the only prison that can be opened only from the inside.”

The trouble is so many of us never come out of the prison of loneliness because we make sweeping assumptions and judgments about people. And these assumptions and judgments cause the circle of people around to become very small. We have a knack for putting people in categories: “They’re mean. They’re rich. They’re poor. They’re arrogant. They’re successful. They’re conceited.” Often these categories cause us to push people away from us. In choosing our categories it never occurs to us think, “They’re human, too.”

Arthur Caliendo remembers overhearing a conversation in a church hallway. One man said to another, “I always feel like you don’t like me, and I have never understood that. Because in all the time we have known each other, you have never once even tried to find out who I am.” It was a poignant moment for Caliendo because it reminded him that too often he was guilty of the same thing. He would make

quick assumptions about people and push them out of his life. He would cheat himself out of possible friendship and support.

It happens. I heard about a graduate of University of Florida. She announced to her parents one evening at the dinner table that she had broken off her engagement to a guy with whom she was in love. When she told her parents of the breakup, they asked, “Did he cheat on you? Did he hurt you? Did he stop loving you?” To each question, she answered, “Of course not. He is the finest, most loving person I know.” Then they asked: “Did you stop loving him?” Again she answered, “Of course not. I will always be in love with him.” Totally confused, her mother and father said, “Then we don’t get it. Why on earth are you breaking the engagement?” The young lady replied, “I just don’t think I can bear to grow old with a man who went to Florida State!”

If we want to be loved and to love – if we don’t want to be lonely, we need to look beyond our assumptions and categories about people and reach out to them. When we do, we will see that when we are cut, we all bleed. When we are tickled, we all laugh. When we are hurt, we all cry. When we are alone, sometimes we feel lonely.

When the dark clouds of loneliness come in, there is the rainbow of understanding.

The Rainbow of the Church

One of the great myths in our society is that we don’t need each other. We can do things on our own. This myth is especially alive in American culture. We isolate ourselves in gated communities. We spend so much time in isolation chambers called cars, speeding through life all alone with the radio on. We put our I-pod headphones on and shut out the world. We have replaced real connection with people with artificial means of communication through texts, emails, tweets, and Face Book posts. Don’t get me wrong. There is a place for this wonderful technology, but nothing will ever replace genuine connection with people. Technology is great, but tell me what kind of technology can feel the human heart?

God knew from the beginning that we need each other. Why do you think God created the church? We need each other. You need the church. I need the church. We need the church together. There is no such thing as an isolated Christian. In order to walk the path God has for us, we need companions and guides along the way. We can’t do it alone.

Are you lonely? Well, have you connected with the church? Have you joined a small group?

Are you serving with others in ministry? Give the church of Jesus Christ a chance.

Jesus modeled to us how we need each other. Jesus chose twelve people to be his disciples. He needed them. Yes, they were His disciples. Yes, they were his followers, but they were also his friends. Jesus knew he could not accomplish his mission alone (Arthur Caliendo, “A Way out of Loneliness”).

We notice on the last night of his life Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He asked his friends to be with him. He didn’t want to be alone. Later, he would say to his disciples and friends, “In a little while, I will be leaving you physically. I can’t be with you anymore, and this is what I want you to do – stick together and love each other as I have loved you.”

The church is a community that does what Jesus says. We stick together and love each other the way Christ has loved us. We know the spirit of Christ is with us. That is the church, and that is the cure to loneliness.

Maya Angelou tells a wonderful story about her Aunt Tee in her book “Wouldn’t Take Nothin’ for My Journey Now.” Aunt Tee was a maid in a huge house in Los Angeles. The wealthy couple she worked for loved to entertain and throw parties. But as they got older, fewer people came to dinner, and there were no more parties. It got to a point where the couple would just sit there like sticks and say nothing. They were like two dead people still breathing.

Aunt Tee was different. She knew how to have a good time. She had that wonderful gift of drawing people together and bringing joy to everyone. Every Saturday night she invited other maids and servants from the other houses up and down the street for a big meal and a party. They would play music and dance. They would tell jokes. They would sing. One Saturday night her employers knocked on the door. When she opened it, they said, “You always seem to have such a wonderful time on Saturday night. Would you mind leaving your door open so we can hear you?” (Caliendo). They stayed on the outside.

Are you lonely today? Do you hunger for friendship and connection? Come on in. Come in to the fellowship of the church. Don’t stay on the outside. In here you will find true friends and the chance to be a friend. And you will find the ultimate friend in Jesus Christ. Come on in. You don’t have to be lonely anymore. There is a place for you. Amen.