

Real Faith For Real People:
“Why Am I So Lonely?”
Acts 2:42-47

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Why am I so lonely? Do you ever ask yourself that question? On Google’s “Lonely Life” website, a lady by the name of Amanda made this entry: “I am living in NYC. I miss my family really bad. My boyfriend dumped me. I lost my job. I am feeling very, very lonely tonight - lonely enough to Google loneliness.”

Loneliness is increasing in America. IN 1985, 10% of Americans said they had no close friends. By 2004, that percentage had increased to 24.6%. Loneliness is an epidemic.

And I think I know the reason why. Americans have bought a lie. We were raised to believe that rugged individualism was the road to happiness. We also bought in to the illusion that self-discovery spelled Utopia. We worked for and secured our privacy. We have our private bedrooms, private baths, private entertainment centers, where family members can go for days without running into each other. We got what we wanted. Do we want what we got?

God said in the creation story, “It is not good for man to be alone.” The scared, confused, sometimes conflicted band of believers who formed the Christian Church got one thing right. They stuck together. They devoted themselves to the fellowship. That is what I want to talk about today.

WE COMBAT LONELINESS BY KEEPING COMPANY WITH CHRIST.
And they devoted themselves to prayer.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief’s to bear! 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 stay around long enough to hear the answer. Friends know your deepest and darkest secrets and love you anyway. Have you found Jesus to be a friend?

Sandy and I celebrated our 43rd wedding anniversary last Wednesday. She is a patient woman. I wanted to show her my deepest appreciation for our years together, so I took her out to our Wednesday Night Dinner here at church. I keep saying it is the best deal in town.

Let this old man fill you in on a little secret. Never expect your spouse to do for you what only Christ can do. No spouse can fix the hole in your soul. No spouse can fulfill all your fantasies. No spouse can be all things to all people, although some valiantly try.

Only Christ can love us with no strings attached. Only Christ can forgive us freely

and completely. Only Christ can solve the homesickness of the soul that longs for something more. Cultivate your companionship with Christ, and give your family a break.

Did you read the Upper Room for Saturday? The devotion was written by Louise Kilpatrick, a 30-year-old widow and mother of two boys ages 2 and 5. She said, "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."

WE COMBAT LONELINESS BY KEEPING COMPANY WITH THE COMMITTED. *They broke bread in their homes, and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*

The Wesley Revival that swept through England in the mid 1700's saved that country from moral and social collapse, in the minds of many.

The leaders of that spiritual awakening were John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, Hanna Ball, and several others. The great preacher of the movement was George Whitfield. George could wow the crowds. The problem was they scattered as quickly as they gathered.

Addressing the problem, methodical John Wesley organized Methodist societies, class meetings and bands. The groupings of fifty, twelve, and seven or so became the glue that held the movement together. These gatherings provided fellowship, mutual accountability, and a safe place to work out our own salvation.

So it came to pass that much Methodist preaching ended not with an altar call, but an invitation to the next class meeting. Eventually these small groups produced more converts than the public preaching.

Several years ago I began praying that BUMC would grow smaller as it grew larger, that it would grow deeper as it grew wider. Little did I know then that God would use my illness to empower this ministry. Had He asked, I would have made several different suggestions. Nevertheless, to God be the glory, for I never want to let a trouble go to waste.

What God has begun in us, must now move through us that this church may continue to bear fruit in the Kingdom of God. That needs to happen in at least two ways.

First, every Sunday school class, prayer group, UMW Circle, support and service network must become a "Saving Station along the road to Holy Living." We are great at caring for one another. Could we not become great at helping one another find the Lord?

Secondly, what is now happening in part must expand to the whole. We are involved in so many things, but let us not neglect the calling to exponentially expand our Sunday school classes, our small group experiences, and our support networks, till all have a place where everyone is “watched over in love” and “nurtured into faithful discipleship.”

WE COMBAT LONELINESS BY KEEPING COMPANY WITH THE CHURCH. *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.*

Groucho Marx once said, “I wouldn’t want to be a part of any church that would have me as a member.” I want to build a church where the Groucho Marx’s of the world will be welcome. I want to build a church where love is the ethic, grace is the dynamic, and Christ is the center of all that we do.

I want to build a sanctuary, a safe place, for all God’s children, a shelter in the time of storm, a place of stability through the ups and downs, and a place where hope reigns and faith flows.

I want to build a family of faith that comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable, that finds a need and tries to fill it, a place where all God’s children are knit together and strengthened to become the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

I need the Church. You need the Church. We need the Church together. We need to be here.

Some people in Wesley’s day got so involved in their societies and class meetings, that they neglected faithful attendance at church services. Wesley would have nothing to do with it. To those so tempted he wrote, “If it be said, ‘but at the Church we are fed with chaff, whereas at the meeting we have wholesome food,’ “we answer: The prayers of the Church are never chaff. They are substantial food for any who are alive in God. The Lord’s Supper is not chaff, but pure and wholesome for all who receive it with upright hearts. Yes, in almost all the sermons we hear, we listen to many great and important truths. That is not chaff.”

In a large church like this, a Sunday school class or a small group can easily become your church. Tell your friends who are not here that God will have none of that. We need all the parts to be the whole body of Christ.

Maybe there was a time when we could practice our faith privately, get our religion electronically, and pursue our beliefs individually. Not any more. When the world stopped turning that September day, we discovered that we did not want to be alone. We needed to belong. We need faith to carry on.

So, I say to you on the edge, come on in. Welcome home.