

Three C's Acts 2:42-47

Loneliness is increasing in America. And it's not just because of this quarantine. Loneliness was a fact of life for many American's long before this outbreak. And I think I know the reason why.

I think that Americans bought into the lie. We drank the cool-aid. We were told that rugged individualism was the road to happiness. We were told that self-discovery was the way to Utopia. And so we worked hard to isolate ourselves. The front porch rocker was replaced by the Barcalounger in the den.

We gave each child a private bedrooms with a private baths and their own TV. We text each other from across the room and family members can go for days without running into each other. Well, we got what we wanted. Do we still want what we got?

I read in Genesis that God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." And we heard this morning in our reading that 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's what I want to dwell on this morning.

We combat loneliness by keeping company with Christ. There's a poem written in 1855 that was put to music as a hymn that we're all familiar with. It's been sung by the likes of Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Alan Price, Ike & Tina Turner, Alan Jackson, and Brad Paisley. The first line goes like this: "what a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!"

Friends - those rare people who come in when the rest of the world is going out; who ask how you are, and then stay around long enough to hear the answer. Friends know your deepest secrets and love you anyway. We all need friends.

But here's the secret. Never expect friend to do for you what only Christ can do. No friend can fix the hole in your soul. No friend can fulfill all your dreams. No friend can love us unconditionally.

Only Christ can with no strings attached. Only Christ can forgive freely and completely. Only Christ can solve the homesickness of the soul that longs for something more. We need to cultivate our relationship with Christ by keeping company with Him

We combat loneliness by keeping company with the Committed.

In our passage this morning we read that "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts".

Several years ago I began praying that Providence would grow smaller as it grew larger, that it would grow deeper as it grew wider. What God began to do was to move through this church and develop new leaders who will bear fruit in the Kingdom of God. And that's happening in several ways.

Sunday discipleship classes, a prayer group, PPW Circles, fellowship groups that become lifelines to members of the group and others by caring for one another.

When this quarantine is over I hope you'll return to Providence and re-connect in significant ways – not just on Sunday mornings.

But even as we return to "normal" and re-engage in church life, I pray we won't neglect the call to expand our discipleship classes, small group experiences, and support groups, until 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. Our passage this morning said that “every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”

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

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

I want to continue to be a family of faith that comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable, that finds a need and fills it, where 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.

There is a time practice our faith privately, to get our religion electronically, and pursue our beliefs individually. That time is now while the world seems to have stopped turning. And we’re discovering in the process that we don’t want to be alone. That we need to belong. That we’re all better together, even when we’re apart.

So, I challenge you during these days of waiting to be praying for our next step as a church. That God would allow us to use this time of isolation to prepare for new and exciting ways to be connected to Christ and the church so we can be committed to the world.