

Becoming human- giving glory x05. Sunday 04 February_2018.

Human loneliness: the search for meaning and order.

Background text: Genesis 1 - 3. (READ). JOHN 4: 1 – 41A story of Loneliness.

(Ask people to spot the lonely people).

Our AIM for the beginning of this year will be for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human. Another eaves-dropping on the Godhead: -

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| <p>Genesis 2: 18. It is <u>not good for the man (Adam) to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.</u> (Not an inferior: cf God is our helper, Hebrews 13:6)</p> |
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We have previously referred to the Book of *Genesis in the Bible* which causes us to consider and hear the voice of Godhead saying:

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| <p><i>Let US make humanity in our image – they will be like us and resemble us...So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female ... TEV Genesis 1:26 & 27.</i></p> |
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These chapters 1 – 11 are the Judeo-Christian mythic tale of the creation and population of the earth including the creation and Fall of humanity from “perfection”. (Myth – a story telling us a greater truth). In this creation story God’s plan, God’s ideas come from **community and conversation**. Which tells us something essential about the tri-unity of Godhead. It is from the community and communication within the Godhead that humanity – both men and women are made: ***Let US make humanity in our image – they will be like us and resemble us.*** (In us also therefore is the need for community and conversation).

What can we say having heard this statement (Genesis 1: 26 & 27) and what is developed in the whole of the agreed canon of Christian Scripture? This is a foundational and central belief of Christians (and other Abrahamic faiths) that men and women are like God and resemble God and therefore God is **not totally other** or totally foreign to human beings. Humans are created to be community: as people we are community – body, soul and spirit but also, we need to be in relationship with others. Essentially we need to be in relationship with God as well as others who are like us “bone of bone flesh of flesh” resembling God ie humans. ***Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*** (*Shorter Scottish Catechism 1646 & 47*).

Through thousands of generations Abrahamic faiths have held this as self-evident but also taught that human behaviour and choices have estranged us both from God, one another and the rest of creation. Christians have argued that even after the Fall of human beings into doing evil as well as good that human beings still show something of the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 9:6 Human beings were made like God*). **James 3: 9** describes all human beings as made in God’s likeness and therefore challenges us to treat all others with dignity and expectation).

We also asked: what does this consequence of “death” mean? Initially it meant the interruption of human fellowship with God. That **“walking-talking relationship” was interrupted**. When God comes to walk and talk with Adam (humanity) in the garden in the cool of the evening the man and the woman hide from God. (*3: 8 God cries: Where are you?*). Two obvious consequences are the entry of both **fear and loneliness into the human experience**.

We also saw various other consequences of which I site today only – loneliness.

LONELINESS – humans hiding from God and men and women estranged from one another. Last week we asked: what exactly is loneliness? Is loneliness always negative? Can it be used positively? The Bible tells us that as vital as human companionship and consolation is for wholeness it is NOT enough. Loneliness ignored or unchallenged leads to dis-ease in humans.

Loneliness as a human condition – we should not always pathologize loneliness ie see it as something needing medication. It is a part of every life and particularly in times of change and transition e.g. broken relationships, ending jobs or loosing role – retirement, redundancy, bereavement, adolescence or aging etc etc **Loneliness is to be frightened of reality & connectedness.** (Varnier. Can I trust again or will I be hurt?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9IHR3dA2MU> “Inside Out” 2015 trailer. A family have to move to another state because of Father’s work – everything changes almost! Riley an 11 year old girl struggles with loss, grief and loneliness until....In her mind she experiences many emotions which are depicted as a journey and the characters appear of the optimistic Joy but also Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness. (Trailer on Facebook page).

Existentialists e.g. Sartre view loneliness as the essence of being human. Each human being comes into the world alone, travels through life as a separate person, and ultimately dies alone. Coping with this, accepting it, and learning how to direct our own lives with some degree of grace and satisfaction is the human condition. Some believe it is epistemic and that loneliness is a fundamental part of the human condition because of the paradox between people's consciousness desiring meaning in life and the isolation and nothingness of the universe.

Conversely, we as: -

Christians feel the experience of “loneliness” is precisely because we are separated, cut off from friendship with God our creator and others and that Jesus comes to re-establish relationship with God and neighbour. Loneliness can in fact drive us deeper into God and also into meaningful relationship with other humans. Loneliness may never be fully satisfied – the hunger may/ will persist until we experience God “face to face” increasingly in this life and through death itself.

I have suggested that loneliness is part of everyone’s human experience as part of our estrangement from God. It is something that we have in common with others and it may be more prevalent at different stages in our lives. (Listening & sharing with others).

I believe loneliness is present in every human being. As Christians are on a journey to recognizing this loneliness and learning to love (even our enemies) and so become truly human.

I have certainly even with my very busy and very social life experienced it. It can in some be negative to the extreme causing mental illness, but it can also be **positive as an emotional experience which can make us more reflective and take us into deeper personal integration and relation with others and also into a deeper union with God.** LONELINESS causes us to seek COMMUNITY – personal integration, meaningful relationships. (E.g. given on Facebook site: volunteering, joining & doing, church). So, **I suggest loneliness can be a force for good.**

Healing and strength flow from healthy relationships. It is not automatic. As humans, following Jesus we are committed to the possibility of change and newness then there is hope. (*Revelation. Jesus: Behold I am making everything new*). _

BUT HOW can we “use” loneliness (if we recognise it) to GROW as people individually and in community? I picked the story of the woman at the well in Sychar because it is a story about loneliness. The woman is totally alone at the well – either she chose to be at the well alone cos it was easier, or she had been so ostracised by the rest of her community that she had no choice. (She might as well have fetched her water “from Coventry”). Her encounter with JESUS changed her because Jesus knew all about her inner search for love and companionship. Then the whole of the village was changed as they too encountered Jesus – they were the marginalised Samaritans. And hopefully it changed the Disciples attitude to people and their searching – and their attitude to Jesus. There are many lonely people in this story – Jesus who seeks the conversation with the woman, the woman herself, the men who had affairs with her and so on. (WORSHIP – is a key issue of loneliness because we are *created to worship and enjoy God forever*).

A journey of discovery and healing: a way home with Jesus. (*Augustine of Hippo – You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in You*). The Bible and Gospel of Jesus teaches us that there are principles that our lives should be based upon and also give us the mission of the church. In these we find our meaning and identity as we follow them. (Modified from Varnier).

- ALL humans are SACRED whatever their state or condition. They were created to know and enjoy God.
- It is part of life to CHANGE, develop and grow rather than stay the same. (Varnier “evolve”). The essential values of God need to be kept: love, openness, forgiveness, neighbour, responsibility for self and neighbour but these need to be worked out in the NOW – in the world as it is.
- Human maturity comes from working with others in dialogue, a sense of BELONGING & SEARCHING TOGETHER. To do this we need opportunity – either it is offered to us or we need to make it. We will find this very difficult even if we are sure of our own identity and place in the world. Why? Because searching for new meaning, deeper meaning will mean that we need to advance into insecurity and newness and also leave behind (* *Genesis 2: 24*) what is the

known. (Sometimes it's like taking a little torch out into the dark and not knowing what we are looking for). We as Christians and church need to give people opportunity and a little light to do this...so:

- Human beings need to be encouraged to MAKE CHOICES AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS. Also we need to break out of our small, safe world and defensiveness. How might you do that?
- If we are going to make choices, then we need space to REFLECT and to SEEK truth and meaning. This is the becoming truly human...to change and to grow.

Are you a truth seeker? (*John 4: 24*) Are you a seeker for meaning and identity? JESUS taught that ***the truth will set us free*** (*John 8: 32*) and also said "*I AM the truth*" (*14: 6*). It may not be easy – in fact it won't – you *may* or rather you will need to go through loneliness and anguish to find solitude. I need to know the truth about myself (and God's love for me) if I am to find identity and meaning. I need to hear the voice of God telling me what reality is – and to hear my soul echo it back in agreement.

The lesson of GOD in JESUS is NOT to live in the past – but in the NOW. If we understand what is happening in the world, and our lives we are enabled to be more fully human.

LONELINESS is painful – that deep inner cry but it can lead us into deeper encounter with God and to take responsibility for our lives and the lives of others. **The necessity of relationship with God and in community – is recognised as we search for meaning and identity.** Many of us do not recognise that is what we are looking for. Perhaps the woman at the well didn't recognise it until she encountered Jesus – and she was not disappointed.

Freedom within Community – order can bring stability and contentment BUT too much CONTROL (in families, friendships or church) can stifle reflection and change. As families, as those in relationship and in church also we need to enjoy safety but not stifle questioning, change and development. The group gives us meaning but a sense of craving belonging runs alongside a need for searching for personal meaning, identity and purpose. (* *Genesis 2:24*) – describes a need to move away to find personal meaning and identity. Leaving family or the church we have grown up in or friendships is not always negative & is needed before cleaving in another relationship or church).