

Not Good To Be Alone: The Dignity of Human Life

Theme: Our souls only find full completion in Christ-centered marriage and/or community.

Text: Genesis 2:18-25

Series: The Dignity of Human Life

Do you realize that there is a dance going on at the center of the universe? The early church fathers described the Trinitarian God as *perichoresis*, which is Greek for *circle dance*. In other words, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit form a divine choreography, a dance of love and joy. Think of Hebrew circle dances at wedding celebrations as an analogy for the dance of God. We noted last week that it was out this laughter and exuberance of community that God created us.

Just as God is the original community as Trinity, so we are humans are made in His image. Alvin Plantinga has written, "At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt each other, commune with each other, defer to one another. Each person, so to speak, makes room for the other." Jesus began his public ministry hearing these words of affirmation from the Father, "You are my son, marked and chosen by my love, the pride of my life." That same family love that the Father has for Jesus, includes us. It is into this love between the Father and the Son that Jesus invites us. Think back to your growing up years. Perhaps there was a family, maybe it was even your family, where there was so much love and health in that home that you just wanted to hang around that family. Like a campfire on a chilly evening, you were just drawn to the warmth of that home. The circle of the Trinity is opened and the warmth of the love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit draws us in.

We reflect God made in His image in that we were created to be fulfilled and completed through relationships. In case we might miss this point the author of Genesis repeats it, but this time in the negative, "It is not good for man to be alone..." (Genesis 2:18). In Genesis 2, man or better "Adam", meaning mankind, is created prior to Eve, or woman. The "it was good", and "it was very good," of Genesis 1 has become the "not good" of Genesis 2. Genesis 2 is simply a magnified version of Genesis 1. Genesis 1 starts at the end with the image of God as "male and female", and then Genesis 2 replays the story in greater detail.

Not Good To Be Alone

"It is not good to be alone..." goes straight to the greatest fear of human life. Loneliness, being cut off from others, leaves the deepest wound.

In preparing for this message the Simon and Garfunkel 60's hit, "I am a Rock", flashed through my mind. Because of Google, I was able to look up the words and be reminded of our longing for love, even in isolation. Listen to these lyrics, and the heart cry behind them.

A winter's day, In a deep and dark December; I am alone,
Gazing from my window to the streets below
On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.
I am a rock, I am an island.

I've built walls, A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.
I am a rock, I am an island.

Don't talk of love, But I've heard the words before;
It's sleeping in my memory.
I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.
If I never loved I never would have cried.
I am a rock, I am an island.

I have my books, And my poetry to protect me;
I am shielded in my armor, Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.
I touch no one and no one touches me.
I am a rock, I am an island.

And a rock feels no pain; And an island never cries.

Deeply hurt, afraid to risk love again, but Oh, so longing to do so. So wanting to come out of hiding and find what He was afraid to find. "It is not good to be alone..."

In John Ortberg's book, *Everyone is Normal Until You Get to Know Them*, he quotes from *The All Better Book*, which is elementary school children's solutions to the world's knottiest problems. They were challenged to figure out a system where no one would be lonely.

Kalani, Age 8: "People should find lonely people and ask their name and address. Then ask people who aren't lonely their name and address. When you have an even amount of each, assign lonely and not lonely people together in the newspaper."

Max, Age 9: "Make food that talks to you when you eat. For instance, it would say, 'How are you doing?' and 'What happened to you today?'"

The most touching solution to loneliness, though, came from Brian, Age 8: "Sing a song. Stomp your feet. Read a book (Sometimes I think no one loves me, so I do one of these.)"

We were made to be completed and fulfilled in our relationships with each other. Not even God is enough for Adam. Adam is created prior to Eve, has the entire garden to himself, with God as His companion, and yet "it is not good for man to be alone." This should undermine the Jesus and me theology, that says I can live this Christian life by myself. No, as we shall see we were made for community and Jesus came to create a new humanity that is a restoration of our tarnished image. But I am getting ahead of myself.

God Fills Human Need

God sets about a solution to Adam's loneliness. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable to him." In a moment we will talk about the meaning of this word "helper." But first, let's see what doesn't fulfill Adam's loneliness. We read in Genesis 2:19, 20:

"Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found."

Adam in his God-assigned role as ruler over creation and all the animals is assigned the task of naming the animals. Yet before Adam's loneliness is filled it is only heightened. With each animal, Adam looks in their eyes with hope that there would be a suitable companion for him. A rabbi commenting on this passage pictures the animals passing by in pairs and Adam commenting, "Everything has its partner but I have no partner."

As a brief, but important aside, many of us have domestic pets, and take great joy in them. They enrich our lives. But Christian theology says that animals are not on the same order of value as people. Yet there are some today who want to equate animals with people in terms of value. One person has articulated the philosophy that all life is equal by saying: "A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Yet the biblical worldview is that humans are not simply a higher order animal in the food chain. Our highest priority is to protect human life for it is only human who bear God's image.

The message in Genesis is that animals cannot fill the emptiness of loneliness, the need for community, that solitary Adam experiences. "But for Adam no suitable *helper* was found."

Helper/Partner

Now to the word translated "helper." Helper is an unfortunate translation. To our Western ears at least, helper sounds subservient, and less than equal. Adam is the boss man, and Eve is his assistant. The intent of the word "helper" is not to view Eve as a "domestic slave, or the household maid."

The overriding theme of Genesis 2 is that Adam needs someone who is his equal to complete him. Walter Bruggeman has written, "The woman was created to 'help' the man out of his aloneness so that together they would form a community of oneness." The original Hebrew translated "helper" here means "one matching him"; "one like but opposite him"; "someone who is equal and adequate to".

Even the way that woman is created stresses partnership and companionship, not subservience. Subservience is a result of the Fall into sin and the curse of God, which is lifted in Christ and the Christian community. But again I get ahead of myself.

Listen to the way Eve is brought into the world. In Genesis 2:21,22 we read: "So the LORD God made him fall into a deep sleep, and he took out one of the man's ribs. Then after closing the man's side, ²²the LORD made a woman out of the rib. The LORD God brought her to the man..." I don't believe the author's point here is to describe a literal anatomical description

of the creation of a woman from a rib. The whole passage is about community, relationship, companionship, overcoming aloneness, so the rib is symbolic of partnership.

St. Augustine is credited with a rather corny exposition of this passage, but it turns out to be pretty good theology. "If God wanted a slave for man he would have created her out of a bone in his foot; if God wanted someone superior to man, then God would have take a bone from his head; But God wanted a companion for man so he took a bone from his side."

In many parts of the world, women are bartered and sold just like a piece of property. In cultures rooted in male dominance, female infanticide is commonplace, because male children are prized. The *Playboy* philosophy treats women as air brushed objects of desire, while throughout the world there is a trafficking is sexual exploitation of women.

I will say unequivocally, there has been no greater force for the elevation of status of women than the dignifying empowerment of the Christian gospel. Jesus scandalized his patriarchal contemporaries with his relationship with women. Rarely did he openly reveal his identity but he did so to the disgraced women at the woman at the well; He forgave the woman caught in adultery; He allowed a prostitute to wash his feet with her tears. Women were a part of his entourage with the disciples and supported his ministry from their wealth. God arranged that the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus would be women in a culture where they were not even allowed to testify in a court of law. From this the apostle Paul draws the conclusion the status between men and women had been equalized, for in Christ "there is neither male or female"(Gal. 3:28).

Completion

That woman was created with a rib from Adam's side is symbolic of the need for a companion and partner. Then comes the moment for which Adam has been waiting. "He [God] brought her to the man..." Now note Adam reaction,

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23).

I love Tim Alan Gardner's fictional description of this moment. Adam has just watched "a long parade of wart hogs, hippos, orangutans, and every other type of creature all coming before him in pairs of twos—they all had dates. Now, feeling very much alone, he awakes to find not another furry, four-footed mammal, but a woman—a ravishing, delightful, completely naked woman. How do you think he reacted? As the old joke says, I think Adam's response was a full fledged, top of the lungs "Yee Ha" where he said, "Whoaaaa! Mannnn!" which is where we get the word "woman."

"Way to go God! Now you're talking."

What is not observable here is a Hebrew pun. Up to this point we have been calling the first man, Adam, for *adam* is the Hebrew word, literally meaning *mankind*. But Adam does not truly take on his maleness until there is a female counterpart. In the Hebrew text the word for man changes from *adam* to *ish* when the woman is brought to the man. Literally, the Hebrew is, "she shall be called *ishshah*, because she was taken out of *ish*." Adam or mankind does not

become male until there is female. See the poetry here. *Ishshah* develops *ish* to his fullness, where *ishshah* has her origins in *ish*. The point of the pun and the poetry is that man and woman find themselves in the reflection of the other.

"It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a *counterpart* suitable for him."

How does God kill the killing worm of loneliness? Through relational covenant. We find our identity in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman and in the new covenant community called the church in which Jesus Christ is the center. If the image of God in humans is as I am trying to demonstrate, fundamentally relational, then it is not a surprise that this relationship is shaped by covenant. Our God is a covenanting making God.

The Covenant of Marriage

Immediately inserted into the text is the primary covenant that forms the union of the sexes made in the image of God. The author, obviously looking beyond the original couple, introduces the biblical definition of marriage. In the New Testament when Jesus and Paul spoke about marriage they looked back to Genesis 2:24: **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and *be united* to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).**

This is one of the texts where I actually have a fondness for the KJV. In the Old English, it reads, **"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife..."** Cleave has the feel of clutching to and not letting go; you cannot pry us apart. The marital covenant is expressed in the form of a vow. I tell couples in our pre-marital counseling sessions that the very heart of the marital ceremony are the vows of solemn trust you are making to one another. I personally don't believe that you can improve on the traditional wedding vows that go like this:

I, Greg, take thee Lily, to be my wedded wife (husband), and I do promise and covenant; before God and these witnesses; to be thy loving and faithful husband (wife); in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live.

Audacious! Amazing commitment! Lew Smedes has said, **"A vow is an act of trust in the face of an uncertain future."** What is this saying? It is two fallible human beings or as one person put it, **"Every marriage is two incompatible people in an impossible relationship"**, saying to one another, **"Count on it. I will be there in every changing tomorrow; it make no difference 10 years from now, 20 years from now, 40 years from now, no matter what comes our way, I will remain true."**

Does this sound like someone else we know? This is what our God says to us. You can count on me. That is why Lew Smedes also said, **"We are most like God when we keep our promises."** Marriage ideally is the human relationship that most clearly mirrors God covenantal relationship with us. As the church of Jesus Christ, we owe it to God, each other and the community we serve to hold high this ideal. Whether it be the defense of marriage itself in a culture of serial relationships, or the defense of marriage as the union between a man and a woman in the face of the juggernaut in support of gay marriage, what we bring as salt and light is an appreciation of what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God.

The Church As God's Covenant People

This leads me to another covenant, the New Testament covenantal community birthed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not all of us married or have found the kind of intimacy and trust in marriage that is pictured here. For all of us who have failed to keep our promises or have been victims of other broken promises there is a community of grace.

We are all promise breakers in one form or another. None of us has ever fully kept our promises; we have violated God's law and standards. So God looked beyond Genesis 1 and 2 to Genesis 3—Revelation; He looked beyond His original role as Creator to when He would pursue us as Redeemer all the way to sending His Son into this world to buy our sinful lives back through the cross.

The image of God in us that was tarnished through our promise breaking, would be restored by the One who bore the very image of God, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says of Jesus in Colossians 1:15, "He is the image of the invisible God..." The true image bearer, the God-man, came among us to restore the image of God in us and restore a community that bears His image. The church in God's scheme is the restored community; the place where our isolation in sin that separates us from God and each other is overcome, because the ticket into this community is to admit our brokenness, receive forgiveness, and be reconciled to God and each other.

It is here that our loneliness is filled through the community in whom Jesus dwells, a new humanity infused by the life of the image bearer. This is to be true family that reflects that original family we know as the Triune God. At Christ Church what we long to be is that place where people can say, "I belong here and find my deepest longings fulfilled in the intimacy of relationship is the new humanity that Jesus is creating."

Thank God this is happening. Just this week an email was passed to me by permission from a new couple who are finding life in community here after a very protracted and disappointing previous church relationship. This note was written to a small group of which they are a part, "We are relatively new...yet you were ready to come to our door to check on us, despite the distance. You cared about our well being in a way we've not experienced from any church we've attended. You, and others we've met at CCOB, stand as a testament to what Jesus commanded of us. And we sing your praises far and wide, for Him. Never have we felt so loved by so many...even folks who don't know us well. And we're not even members! We thank our Father for leading us here and for showing us what His people are truly made of. Bountiful blessings for all of you."

I can only wish this were the universal experience of everyone who comes to us. Knowing that we are fallen and fallible creatures, this unfortunately will not be the case. Yet, we can pray that in an ever increasing way, we will be the community in whose life Jesus dwells and that He will raise up His community of love so can say, "We are not alone."

For those who have not yet come out of the crowd, Jesus is calling you to follow Him in community. Come out from anonymity, and let us love you in His name.