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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 22 (Pentecost 19), Series B
Saturday, October 2nd, 2021 (10th Anniversary of Installation)
Sunday, October 3rd, 2021

Sermon: “Not Good”
Text: Genesis 2:18-25

Focus: God created us for communion with him and community with each other.
Function: That they would find acceptance and community within the fellowship of Christ’s Church.
Structure: Story-Framed
Locus: “In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth” (SC, 3rd Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone...’” (Gen. 2:18a, ESV).¹ For the first time in history—and the *only* time in the Creation narrative—God called something “not good.” This is a stunning statement, jarring to our ears. On the First Day of creation, after God spoke light into being, we are told, “And God saw that the light was good...” (Gen. 1:4a). The refrain throughout the creation account was “And God saw that it was good” (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And then, at the end of the Sixth Day, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very* good...” (v. 31a).

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

But earlier that day, after God had made man but not yet formed woman, he declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone...” (2:18a). Human beings are not meant to be alone. Solitude is good for a time of prayer and rest. Jesus often withdrew to lonely, “desolate places” to pray (Luke 5:16). But he always returned to the disciples and the crowds. It is not good for a man to be alone. God created us for communion with him and community with each other. By ourselves, we wither up and die.

Even before the pandemic, psychologists were telling us that in America we are suffering from an “epidemic of loneliness.” During the Covid shutdown, this became even more pronounced, as we were cut off from face-to-face interaction with friends and family. Some people went days, weeks, or months without physical contact and touch from other people. Social media and Zoom helped people stay “connected” digitally, but not personally. Facebook isn’t as good as face-to-face. While Zoom stock soared early in the pandemic, people quickly grew bored and frustrated with the digital “meeting” format. Diagnoses of

depression soared. Incidents of suicide increased. Over the past year, 1 in 4 young adults has reported experiencing suicidal thoughts.

But this is nothing new. Nearly 25 years ago, Robert Putnam already reported on the alarming loneliness in America. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam provides research indicating that Americans' active participation in social groups, such as churches, community service organizations, and political parties has decreased significantly since the 1960's. He blames the trend towards individual isolation on television and the Internet (this was in 1995!). "Putnam uses bowling as an example. Although the number of people who bowl has increased in the last 20 years [from 1975 to 1995], the number of people who bowl in *leagues* has decreased. If people bowl alone, they do not participate in social interaction and civic discussions that might occur in a league environment" (Wikipedia.org). They are, literally, bowling alone.

Yet even within the Church, which by its very definition is a *community* of people, loneliness persists. Much of the church's messaging and programing focuses on families and children. What if

you are single, widowed, or divorced? Where do you fit into that paradigm? Perhaps you sometimes feel like a “third wheel” at church. (*Aside: I hope not, but if you, come and see me*). In particular, the younger generation feels lonelier than those who are age 35 and older. Research by the Barna Group reveals that “Young Christian men (55%) are significantly more likely to say they have frequently or occasionally felt lonely within the last month, compared to older men (28% 55 and older; 43% 35 to 54).”² Interestingly, work has an impact on people’s sense of loneliness, and, as we know too well, many people could not or would not work during the pandemic. “Men who pursue wealth or focus on career success are more likely to feel lonely and overwhelmed.” Yet at the same time, unemployed and underemployed men also report higher feelings of loneliness than those with jobs. So, if you work too much—or not enough—you are more likely to be lonely. People who work full-time with appropriate boundaries and motivation for their work tend to be more fulfilled.

² Barna and Better Man, *Five Essentials to Engage Today’s Men*, 2020.

God has known this from the beginning, which is why he said, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18a, NIV). So God came up with a wonderful solution: “I will make a helper fit for him” (v. 18b). God would make a “helper” for Adam—not a servant or slave, not a doormat, not a business partner or roommate. A helper. Eve was not inferior to Adam. The same Hebrew word (רֵעַ, *ēzer*) is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the help that comes from God—certainly our *Superior* (cf. Ps. 30:11; 54:4; Isa. 63:5). According to one Bible scholar, “The verb behind *ezer* is *azar*, which means ‘succor,’ ‘save from danger,’ ‘deliver from death.’ The woman in Gen. 2 delivers or saves man from his solitude.”³

I want to say one more thing about verse 18 before we move on. I cannot help but notice the juxtaposition of what God says in verse 17 with what he says in verse 18. In verse 17, Yahweh tells Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you *shall not eat*, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (vv. 16-17). In verse 17, God commands

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, in series *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 176.

Adam NOT to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In verse 18, he says it's not good for the man to be alone. Verse 18 follows verse 17. (*Aside*: "Thanks, Captain Obvious!"). In God's mind, these two ideas seem related: the command not to eat and the "not good" status of Adam's loneliness. So I cannot help but wonder if part of the reason for the creation of Eve was in order to help Adam *keep* the commandment God gave him.

In other words, part of the reason why we need Christian community is to help us to guard against sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says exactly that in his book, *Life Together*:

"Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness. Sin wants to remain unknown."

"Sin wants to be alone with people," Bonhoeffer tells us. When we are alone, we more easily fall prey to the temptations and attacks of the devil. We are more exposed and without the aid and comfort of our brothers and sisters in Christ. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his

fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” (Eccl. 4:9-10).

Some sins are group efforts, but think of how many sins we commit take place when we are alone: drinking alone, looking at Internet pornography alone, nursing a grudge alone, stealing or taking what isn't ours when we are alone. It is not good for the man to be alone.

Here is yet another reason for you to come back to church if you are still at home. We need you, and you need us. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). Come out of your cocoon. God himself declares that it is “not good” for you to be alone.

So in his wonderful grace, God created a helper for Adam. He put Adam to sleep and did some sacred surgery, removing his rib and lovingly fashioning it into the form of a woman. When Adam woke up in the recovery room, he couldn't believe his eyes. His jaw dropped when he beheld Eve, and he said, “Whoa! Man!” And so she is called

“woman.” No, what he actually did was to break out into Hebrew poetry (a love song): “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (v. 23). (*Aside:* The Hebrew words for man and woman look and sound similar: man is *ish*, and woman is *ishshah*). Adam delighted in his bride because now—“*at last!*”—he discovered community and relationship with another human being. As I said earlier, God created us for communion with him and community with each other. Any disruption of that is against his design and will for his creation. It is not good for the man to be alone.

I recognize, of course, that Genesis 2 speaks of the first marriage, which was a match made in heaven (literally!). It is a favorite wedding text for preachers. The next verse of the chapter explicitly makes this connection: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (v. 24). And Jesus applies this text to his teaching on marriage and divorce in today’s Gospel reading from Mark 10.

Yet Genesis 2 is about more than marriage. It is also about human community. It is not good for the man to be alone. Nor is it good for the *woman* to be alone. Nobody should be alone.

And in Christ, we are never alone. Instead, we are all one. Jesus says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt. 18:20). Isn’t that why we are here today: to gather in Jesus’ name, to come together to hear his Word, pray together, laugh and weep together? Isn’t that why we invoked his name at the beginning of the Divine Service: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?” (*Aside: Isn’t it wonderful and amazing that even within the Godhead of the Trinity, there is fellowship and community—the perichoresis, or inner dance, of the Three Persons, as the Early Church Fathers liked to say*).

When Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins, he didn’t die just for you or just for me. He died for all! He doesn’t save only individuals. He saves people to bring them into a community, his Body, the *Church*, where we shed our loneliness and experience the presence

of God in Word and Sacraments, and where we celebrate and share his presence together in fellowship and Communion (Greek: *koinonia*).

That is why it is especially important to come to church during hard times. Often, when we are grieving the death of a loved one, battling disease, or struggling with the guilt and shame of our sin, we tend to withdraw from Christian community. We abandon our brothers and sisters like sick animals that go off into the woods to die alone. But it is not good for *you* to be alone. That is why, in the funeral liturgy of the Church, we pray: “Help us... in the midst of things we cannot understand, to believe and find comfort in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” (*LSB Agenda*). We find comfort in the communion of saints. What is that? The fellowship of the Church, the fellowship of holy people and holy things. It is not good for the man to be alone.

Jesus promises that in Him, you are never alone. “Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20b). Jesus Christ is Immanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Jesus is God *with*

you... And we are too. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of
T the Holy Spirit. Amen.