

February 8, 2015

Overwhelmed

Overwhelmed by Loneliness!

Genesis 2:15-25

Opening words: This is message number five in my six-part sermon series called *Overwhelmed*. We have been looking at things in our lives that overwhelm us. Everyone is different, yet everyone is the same. To date, we have looked at being overwhelmed by self-expectations, money and responsibility. Next week, we will look at being overwhelmed by doubt. Today, we look at being overwhelmed by loneliness. I generated this list by asking the people in my life the question, what overwhelms you?

We find ourselves in the second chapter of Genesis. It is important that you know the first eleven chapters of Genesis are considered prehistorical. They explain why the world is in its present state. They tell us how the world was created. They tell us how sin came into the world. They tell us the origin of world languages. Our scripture lesson for today deals with one of the great fears in our world today, loneliness. Our scripture lesson for today is Genesis 2:15-25. Let me call this message *Overwhelmed by Loneliness!*

Genesis 2:15-25 ¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. 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 in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam^[f] no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs^[g] and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib^[h] he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ 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."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Lolita is a killer whale. For approximately the past fifty years she has lived in captivity. She presently resides at the Miami Seaquarium in Florida. For years, activists have protested her living conditions. They say she was meant to live in the wild. Recently, a ruling by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) may make that demand a reality. They have ruled Lolita's class of killer whale an endangered species. That would force the Seaquarium to release her into the wild. This is the problem. Lolita has been in captivity for approximately fifty years. That means she has been surrounded and cared for by humans for fifty years. That raises some important questions. Many doubt she will be able to survive in the wild. They are not sure she could even feed herself or socialize with other whales. She may be more susceptible to disease. Living away from humans may lead to an early death. What do you think about Lolita? Do you think she should live the rest of her life isolated from human contact in the wild? Do you think she should live the rest of her life surrounded by people? Lolita's story is not just the story of a killer whale. It is really our story. How important is human contact to you? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

We are instructed today from the second chapter of Genesis. The word Genesis means "Birth." According to the first chapter of Genesis, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The second chapter of Genesis deals with the creation of mankind. You know the story; many outside of our tradition know the story as well. Adam is also mentioned in other sacred writings, the Quran, the Book of Mormon and the sacred writings of the Bahai' Faith. According to our sacred text, the Bible, Genesis 2:7 says that Adam, the first man, was formed from the dust of the ground. Adam means "ground" or "dirt." God places Adam in the Garden of Eden. In Hebrew, the word "Eden" means "pleasure". It lives up to its name, except for one thing. Adam is alone. God recognizes the problem and creates Eve, which means "to live." I hope that story sounds familiar. The story reminds us that we can be surrounded by good things and still be alone. Companionship is important.

Have you ever been alone in a crowd? I have. I was alone in a crowd at my wife's high school reunion. I have no ties to "the good old days." I was never a Bobcat. I am alone in a crowd at every clergy meeting I am required to attend. I have a hard time relating to them because I am not worried about my next appointment, my pay or the condition of the parsonage. I am alone in a crowd every time I am seated at the aunt's table at the wedding reception. I do not know any Lutheran ministers in Kansas. I was alone in a crowd cheering for the Indians in the middle of Boston's Fenway Park.

I have been alone in a crowd in Russia. Several years ago, Kathryn and I were in Moscow. The rest of the team had flown home but we stayed behind to visit a friend. Matt had gone to Russia with Kathy as a teenager, but now he was a missionary in the Evil Empire. She changed his life. For a few days he showed us his work. It was really something. The night before we flew home, we went out to dinner. We took a city bus to the restaurant. It is odd being an American on a Moscow city bus. After dinner, we were taking the bus back to his apartment when Matt announced he was going to leave

us. He had something he had to do. He tried to give us directions. Ride the bus three more stops, cross the street and walk west two more blocks, then a right. Look for the lamp in his window and you are home. Do you know what we did? We begged him to stay with us. It was cold and dark. We didn't speak the language. We didn't know exactly where to go. The truth is we were afraid. The bus was filled with people, Russians. The whole thing intimidated me. I was relieved when he said, "OK!" He took us home. This is the point. You can be part of a crowd, yet all alone. If you have ever been alone in a crowd, say, "**Amen!**" Yet, there is more to the story. The story of Adam and Eve remind us that loneliness is unnatural. Loneliness can be dangerous. How many poor decisions have you made because you didn't want to be alone?

Years ago, Kathryn had a man in her church who was lonely. I do not remember his name but I do remember his story. Let's just call him Bob. For decades, Bob was married to the same woman. They were happy together and raised some wonderful children. In retirement, they did everything together. One day, Bob took his wife to the doctor's and was told she was terminal. Over the next few years their calendars were filled with doctor's appointments and hospital stays. I hate to say it, but modern medicine and a great attitude couldn't save her. When the funeral was over, Bob returned to an empty house. Alone, he tried to pick up the pieces, but the void was too great. A short time later, he was introduced to someone new. A short time after that, they were married. Bob's quiet, respectable life was turned upside down. The new wife demanded Bob cut off any relationship with his children. The new wife demanded he accept her children. The new wife demanded the new home be redecorated. The new wife demanded a new car and new clothes. The new wife demanded they travel regularly. The new wife demanded everything. The only thing that stopped her from demanding more was the doctor. This time, it was Bob's turn, Bob was terminal. The demanding new wife ran for the hills. She was absent for the doctor appointments and the hospitalizations. Bob's children re-entered his life and we were there on the day he died. They mourned their father's death, but the demanding wife was absent. On the day Bob was buried, his children had the locks changed on the family home. Bob's son answered the question everyone was asking, "Why did Bob marry her?" He said, "My dad was afraid to be alone." Is anyone here afraid of being alone? Have you ever been overwhelmed by loneliness?

I do not believe we have a single person as foolish as Bob, but I do believe we all need help handling loneliness. It is not just one of our greatest fears, it is a part of life. There is no vaccine against loneliness. If there were, I would give it to you. The best I can do is give you three keys to help you the next time you find yourself alone. These are the keys. The first key is to **embrace your relationships**. Everyone is different, everyone is special. Every relationship should be prized. Embrace all your relationships. The second key is to **embrace your purpose**. You are in this world for a reason. A life without purpose is pointless. There is more to life than killing time. Embrace your purpose. The third and final key is to **embrace God**. Never forget, Jesus came into the

world to have a relationship with you. God wants to spend eternity with you! If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

Embrace your Relationships

The first key to handle loneliness is to embrace your relationships. This message is called "Overwhelmed by Loneliness." I would have had an easier time writing a message called "Overwhelmed by People." I do not want to boast, but my life is full of people. I spend very little time in complete isolation. I am fortunate to have so many people in my life. I got to marry the love of my life. We have two adult daughters, who I communicate with every day. I have a son-in-law, who calls me on his way home from school. I regularly receive the newest picture of my granddaughter, Pippa. I have good friends inside and outside of the church. I get to be part of your lives during crucial times. My sisters and I are strange because we actually like and respect one another. I communicate with them regularly. We can talk about family history or we can talk about today. I don't want you to feel bad, but I can't think of a single person that I truly hate. All of my relationships are healthy. I try to treat everyone with dignity and respect. I don't understand people who get their feelings hurt and never return. I do not understand people who hold a grudge. Life is too short. Do you embrace all your relationships, or do you have some work to do? How would your life change if one of your relationships was suddenly gone? The first key to handling loneliness is embracing your relationships. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

Embrace your Purpose

The second key to handling loneliness is to embrace your purpose. George Sanders was one of Hollywood's leading men years ago. He was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1906 to English parents. They left Russia during the revolution. In his life he married four times. I love this guy because he married two of the Gabor sisters, Zsa Zsa and Magda. Marrying your sister-in-law cannot be good. What bothers me about him is that he took his own life at 66 years old in 1972. He left this note behind, *I committed suicide because I am bored and because I have already lived long enough.* Does anyone here feel like they have lived long enough? George Sanders made the mistake that so many people do. They live for themselves. Don't make that mistake. Live for other people. God has designed each one of us differently. Each one of us brings something different to the table. Use your God-given gift to help someone else. What are you doing for God today? Embrace your purpose. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

Embrace God

The third and final key to handling loneliness is to embrace God. It is the story of the Christian faith. Did you know, according to a CNN poll, 81% of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die? Did you know 88% of Americans expect to see departed family members or friends when they get to heaven? Do you believe you are going to heaven when you die? Do you expect to see departed loved ones in heaven? The third key to loneliness is to embrace God. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

According to CNN, Faustino Barrientos is the loneliest man in the world. Who is Faustino Barrientos? He is an eighty-one year old gaucho, a modern day cowboy and trapper, who for the past forty-six years has lived in isolation by Lake O'Higgins in the mountains of Chile, a harsh piece of landscape between Chile and Argentina. His only human contact comes once every two years, when he travels to a small town to sell his goods and buy some basic supplies. Living in three small shacks, his only contact with the outside world comes from a small transistor radio, which keeps him up to date on sports scores and world events. While many couldn't handle the isolation, Faustino wouldn't change a thing.

Would anyone here trade places with Faustino? I would, but only for a short time. I am more like Adam, who needed companionship. I need people in my life and so do you. Loneliness is one of the great fears in our world. **Embrace your relationships.** Each one is special. **Embrace your purpose.** What are you doing for God today? **Embrace God.** After all, you are going to be spending eternity with him. Mother Teresa once said, *"Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."*

Will you pray with me?