

Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Created for Community
Genesis 2:18 – 25

In our nation with its increasing polarization and violence, we need *hope*. We need hope that it won't always be this way and hope that it wasn't always this way, that we weren't *created* to be this way. We need reminders of what unites us.

So today, we begin week two of our sermon series entitled "Human Being." In this series, we consider that which unites us, going all the way back to the beginning. We go all the way back to the beginning, to the creation story in Genesis, and thoughtfully consider how we were created to be, and what that means for us today. Today, we explore how we were created for community.

In May 2012, an article in People Magazine was published, featuring Yvette Vickers, former Playboy playmate and B-movie star. Yvette's neighbor noticed cobwebs and yellowing letters in her mailbox, and so went looking for Yvette. Yvette was found mummified near a running heater and a computer, with its screen still glowing. No one knew how long she had been there.

Within two weeks, Yvette's lonely death was the subject of 16,057 Facebook posts and 881 tweets. She had become an icon of a new kind of horror – "our growing fear of loneliness." Her neighbor searched "[her] phone bills for clues about the life that led to such an end. In the months before her...death, [Yvette] had made calls not to family or friends but to distant fans who had found her through fan conventions and Internet sites."¹

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/>

In October of last year, the Barna Group released a report, entitled “U.S. Adults Have Few Friends – and They’re Mostly Alike.” In this report, they found that in the U.S., “the majority of adults [have] anywhere between two and five close friends, but one in five regularly or often feels lonely. Those who [reported] the highest levels of loneliness [were] single, male, young and likely earning a lower income.”²

In March of this year, USA Today reported that Gen Z is the loneliest generation of all – and it is becoming increasingly lonely. “The percent of high school seniors who said they often felt lonely increased from 26 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2017.” This loneliness has garnered increased interest in the medical field, because of its “link to mental and physical health, [and] life expectancy.”³

In short, 20% of adults often feel lonely and 39% of high school seniors often feel lonely. 20 and 39%. And this loneliness is affecting mental and physical health and life expectancy. In the United States, we have become increasingly aware of our loneliness, and increasingly aware of how our loneliness is *killing* us.

We know that deep within our bones, we weren’t *meant* to be lonely or without friends. We weren’t *created* to be alone.

In Genesis 2, God creates man. He creates man to tend His garden. But in verse 18, God says that “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

² <https://www.barna.com/research/friends-loneliness/>

³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/03/20/teen-loneliness-social-media-cell-phones-suicide-isolation-gaming-cigna/3208845002/>

When we hear the word “helper,” we think of someone in a subordinate or merely supportive position. But this Hebrew word *ezer*, “helper,” is never used in the Old Testament in a context where someone is in a subordinate position. In 16 out of its 21 uses, “helper” is in fact in reference to *God*. “We wait in hope for the LORD; He is our help and our shield,” Psalm 33:20. “Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay,” Psalm 70:5. ““You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your helper,”” Hosea 13:9.

God sees that it is not good for man to be alone, and so He determines to make a helper for him. In so few words, God calls the man’s aloneness “helplessness.”⁴ So, God forms animals and creatures of all kinds out of the ground of the earth. He brings them to the man to see what the man will name them. Verse 19 says that “whatever the man [calls] each living creature, that [is] its name.” This is kind of odd language to say that the man does not simply choose whatever name he wants for each creature, but that in naming each creature, he is rightly identifying the true name and identity of each creature. But, as each creature is brought to the man, he does not find the one who is to help him in the garden.

So, God causes the man to fall into a deep sleep. Verse 21 says that while the man is sleeping, God “[takes] one of the man’s ribs and [closes] up the place with flesh.” If you are following along in your pew Bibles, you may notice a little letter by the word “rib” in verse 21. If you follow that letter down to the bottom of the page,

⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 82.

you will see a note that says, “Or took part of the man’s side.”⁵ If you like languages and language study, you can look up this Hebrew word *tsela*, and discover that this word is translated “rib” twice in Genesis and everywhere else in the Old Testament, it’s translated as “side.” This study causes us to consider that our naming of this word, *tsela*, in Genesis 2 is better translated as “side.” So let’s read verses 21 and 22 with this better translation. “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 sides and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the side he had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man.”

When the man sees her, he rightly identifies her as having his bones and his flesh. ““This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man,”” he says (Gen 2:23).

This story is a story of mutuality, of strength, of equality. *God* had declared that it wasn’t good for the man to be alone. He needed help, relief, so God split the man, and woman was created. This is a wonderful echo of Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Genesis 2:25 demonstrates that mutuality is a simple verse, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” They were in perfect relationship with one another and with God, so there was no reason to cover or hide. They could walk around like little children, who see no reason to cover their nakedness. They

⁵ NIV 1984, p. 3.

were in perfect relationship with one another and with God, and did not feel less than, exploited, or ashamed. They were one.

The moment the woman and man disobeyed and ate from the forbidden tree, however, everything changed. They realized they are naked, and so they clothed themselves with leaves. They hid when they heard God walking in the garden. They didn't take responsibility for their action, but the man placed blame on the woman, and the woman placed blame on the serpent. Instead of responding that *they* had disobeyed, each one responded with *I*. “*I* heard You in the garden, and *I* was afraid because *I* was naked; so *I* hid” (Gen 3:10). “The serpent deceived *me*, and *I* ate” (Gen 3:13b).

Their relationships are shattered. The naked vulnerability they once knew with God and with one another is now gone. They cover themselves by anything they can think of to hide themselves so that they will not be seen.

To the woman, God says that her pain in childbearing will greatly increase and that her desire will be for her husband, and he will rule over her (Gen 3:16). Childbearing was not *supposed* to be painful, and marriages were not *supposed* to have a hierarchy of subordination and control, but the woman would suffer these consequences as a result of her disobedience.

To the man, God says that the ground will be cursed. The man will work the ground, yet it will produce hardship for him. He will work like a dog and then die.

Genesis 3:20 then says that the man names his wife “Eve.” If you remember, the man had already named her “woman” in Genesis 2:23, but here he names her *again*. He demonstrates his dominance over her by naming her. He gives her a name

that is *unique* to her and no longer shows the mutuality with the man. He names her “Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.”

What once had been a paradise of mutuality and equality was now permeated by distrust, shame, control, and distortion.⁶ And the world continued to experience that brokenness. The man and Eve had children, and the older killed the younger. Self-centeredness, distrust, and isolation were birthed in every person. And though human beings were not created to be alone, each of us cannot help but desire to satisfy ourselves to the destruction of the other.

We must remember that we were created for one another. We were created to be in perfect community with one another, equal partners to serve one another. Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

Our brokenness is the very reason Jesus died. He died to restore our relationship with God, and he calls us to restore our relationships with one another.

As a Christian community, we seek to be a sign, pointing to the way it one day will be. We seek to be a sign pointing to the perfect community we were created to be, perfectly united in relationship with God and with one another. We seek to be this sign, recognizing that it will never be perfect, because no one of us is perfect. No one of us can overcome our selfish desires and love each other as we love ourselves. But we confess each week, and perhaps each day, that we have put ourselves first, and pray that God would put to death our sinful selves and raise to life His Spirit within us, that we may truly love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 51.

In the Boyle Heights Neighborhood of Los Angeles is the world's largest gang-intervention and rehabilitation program, called Homeboy Industries. Homeboy Industries was founded by Father Greg Boyle, who wrote a book of stories from the street, entitled "Tattoos on the Heart." "At the time of its 2010 publication he had participated in the funerals of 168 young men, every one the victim of gang violence.

"Boyle tells about Soledad, whom he describes as one of the most heroic women he has ever known. Soledad was the mother of four children. That is, until her two oldest sons... were murdered by local gang members...She confided to Boyle: 'The hurt wins...the hurt wins.'

"One night, she was taken to the ER suffering chest pains...*The doctors [were] tending to her with EKGs...when there [was] a rush of activity at the entrance. With a flurry of bodies and medical staff moving into their proscribed roles, a teenage gang member [was] rushed to the vacant space right next to Soledad.*

"*The kid [was] covered in blood from multiple gunshot wounds, and they begin cutting off his clothes. The wounds [were] too serious to waste time pulling the curtain that [separated] Soledad from this kid fighting for his life. People [were] pounding his chest and inserting IVs.*

"*Soledad [turned] and [saw] him. She [recognized] him as a kid from the gang that...robbed her of her sons. [She said] 'As I saw this kid...I just kept thinking of what my friends might say if they were here with me. They'd say, 'Pray that he dies.'" But she just looked at this tiny kid, struggling to sidestep the fate of her sons, as the doctors [worked] and [screamed], 'WE'RE LOSING HIM. WE'RE LOSING HIM.'* And I began to cry as I have never cried before and [started] to pray the hardest I've ever prayed.

*'Please...don't...let him die. I don't want his mom to go through what I have.' And [he] lived."*⁷

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church: May we be a sign that points to the community we were created to be, a community which is united and loves one another, a community which is the body of Christ on earth. Amen.

⁷ Glenn McDonald, *Morning Reflection*, 3/18/16.