

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 14, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 2:21

THEME: TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED

21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

In the name of Jesus:

In 2018 the British Red Cross identified a huge challenge facing the British people. It was a growing crisis: “associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day.” In order to address this crisis, the government created a new cabinet position to focus on it. What was this issue? Loneliness. The United Kingdom has a Loneliness Minister along with other cabinet positions to manage defense, foreign relations, education, and other critical aspects of government. (Connected to Christ, pg 11).

Loneliness is everywhere, including in the United States. The insurance company Cigna a couple of years ago did a study, and its findings were just as alarming. They broke their findings down by age groups. They found that those who were the least lonely were the elderly. And those who suffered the most were the younger generation, young people born from 1990 to 2010.

As a society we are the most connected society that has ever existed. We connect with people in so many ways, cards and letters in the mail, emails,

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. The sad fact of the matter is that those who are most connected digitally in the world also turn out to be those who are the most alone.

Sociologists have long pointed out the need for a third place in our lives. The first place that we need is our home. The second place that we need and identify with is the workplace. But the third place where people can connect and relate to others is quickly falling into extinction.

As a culture, we are losing our places of community. We are losing our places where we connect with one another. And as we lose these places, our feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and depression rise.

Cultural observers note that we are seeing a rapid rise of tribalism in the world. Tribalism is where people break into groups, separating themselves from one another and in doing so anger, rage, and isolation occur. People are struggling to find an identity, but in breaking into tribes and subgroups, they miss the thing we need most, community.

But you and I are called to such a time as this! The Church is called to such a time as this! This is the whole theme of Peter's epistle. In fact, he states this phrase, "to this you were called," FIVE TIMES, in order to emphasize that God has indeed called this congregation and His Church to such a time as this.

In times of separation, anxiety and loneliness, God's Good News is that He loves you and is always with you.

This is why Jesus came down from heaven. At one time, the human race was lost, hopelessly adrift, separated from God because of our sins. The loneliness, anxiety, and separation we all experience in life are just symptoms of the great issue: sin. Sin has separated us from God and from one another. At creation God spoke and said: "it is not good for man to be alone." But as a result of our sin, we are separated from God and from one another. Our hearts are turned inward toward ourselves. We see this in the selfishness and self centeredness that is all around us. But God is merciful and just. He desires that all come into fellowship with Him. And so God sent His Son Jesus, born into the world, to love the Lord God with all of His heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving His neighbor as Himself.

Jesus lived sacrificially in His life, and died the Sacrificial death for the sins of all. On the cross Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" He was despised, rejected by God and man, to suffer Hell and all that goes with Hell, all so that we might receive the mercy of God.

God has poured His mercy and grace generously upon you. You have been baptized, your sins are washed away, YOU are a child of God. You belong to the Church, the community of believers in Jesus Christ. Just listen to

what the Bible says about who you are now: “ For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

We have a great and wonderful opportunity before us as a congregation and as a Church. When members of the Church gather together, we have an opportunity to physically hear God’s Word to have our faith strengthened, because faith comes by hearing the Word of God. We have the opportunity to physically partake of the Lord’s body and blood in Holy Communion, something you don’t get to do over the internet. And we have the opportunity to interact with one another in love, to strengthen one another in Christ, and to equip one another to be a blessing to others and to the community we live in.

Soon we’ll be coming out of this pandemic. Yes, it will come to an end. As it does, how will our congregation respond? What can we do to make a difference and be a difference in the world we live in? We will, as a congregation, be presented with new opportunities by God to meet the needs of the isolated, the anxious, and the lonely.

This is what Peter is telling the people of his day and telling you and me today. Back in Peter's time, the early Christians were living in times of uncertainty. These Christians were lower class people, they had no influence, no importance in the world in which they lived in. They didn't know what would happen to them in the future. That is why Peter writes to them to assure them that they are God's people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, chosen by God to live their lives in the callings that God has placed them. As they trusted in Christ, God used them in their time and place, to change the world. They had little money, no technology, they simply didn't have the so called advantages that we have today. But what they did have, is that they had Jesus. Jesus was the center of their lives, in Christ they lived, moved, and had their being. Peer pressure was great back then, but they had a greater Lord, who gave Himself up for them to give them hope and a future.

As we move into the future, post Covid, we have all we need because we have Jesus. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. When we continue to focus on Jesus, and as a congregation when we continue to refocus on Jesus, then God will use us to do great things for Him! As people try to cope with more isolation, more anxiety, and more stress, we have what they really need, Jesus!

So how can we show others the power of Christ? We can do this by being subject to one another in love. To be subject to someone means that you are willing to rank yourself below others just as Jesus did when He humbled Himself to save us. We willingly show others that they are loved because Jesus first loved us. And how do we show this love? We show it in our relationships in marriage, between husband and wife. We show it in our relationship in our families, between parents and children. We show it to the communities we live in by being law abiding citizens. We show it in the workplace by giving honest days work for the wages that we earn. In all things we do, we do it to the glory of God, with Christ as our risen Lord and Savior. As we live for Christ, we share what we have freely received here in this Church, forgiving others as Christ has forgiven us, replacing shame with honor, and living our lives for the benefit of others.

The future may be uncertain, but we have Christ's promise: I will build My Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." God has chosen us for such a time as this, to believe in Christ and to live for Christ, so others might believe in Jesus!

And now," may the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. **11** To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5" 11-12).