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Sermon 408 - John 19:25-27

Woman, Behold Your Son

Loneliness has been referred to by some as an epidemic sweeping across this nation. Just this week a reporter from the Boston Globe was on WGN radio with the subject title, “The biggest threat to middle-aged men: Loneliness.” Discussed along with loneliness are the dire health implications if you are lonely. One magazine article had the title that said, “Loneliness is nearly as likely to kill you as smoking.” I never really thought of a lack of connection as dangerous as a cigarette - but they made the case for it. In fact some studies showed that people who are lonely have a 26% higher risk of death. As a guy myself I find it interesting how often the subject comes up of men and husbands without real guy friends. Though obviously you can feel lonely at any age, being any gender. And get ready for another rant on social media. Surprise, surprise it’s not helping us feel connected. I was reading a book by Steven Furtick who was presenting the case for loneliness as an epidemic and here was a quote, “There is actually a direct correlation between the amount of time you spend on Facebook and the likelihood that your overall sense of personal satisfaction, including your social connectedness, will go down.” Now I’m not exactly sure how they arrived at that conclusion, but I tend to believe it.

Which is why to solve this problem we are having a group outing to this place. Point Blank Gun Range. Because there is nothing that brings guys together quite like gun powder. Just kidding, but not kidding.

Well loneliness is not a new problem. It goes back to the very beginning. Because even in a perfect place God picked out loneliness as a problem. He said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” (Gen 2:18) It is then God placed Adam in community with Eve. He formed woman out of man, and his intent is that they would compliment each other in the community and bonds of marriage. Eve is the solution he provided then, but do you think God is able to provide solutions to loneliness today? Do you think he cares for the isolated and lonely, and do you think he can still provide the solution? I believe so. And to give you the answer ahead of time I believe *the solution for isolation is companionship*. Now that is not a novel idea, but it is something good for us to consider.

And I see God can still provide the solution for isolation because of the words of life he speaks today. We are continuing our series words of life from a dying man. And we are focusing on the last words of Jesus as he hangs on the cross. And it’s amazing what words of life and hope he speaks, even as he is dying. Last week we heard him tell the thief next to him, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” And we considered how good God is, that his grace goes way beyond what is fair. As he cancels a lifetime of sin and debt in a moment. Today we see Jesus interact with such tenderness to his mother Mary. I know it is not mother’s day but if there was ever a lesson for mother’s day and honoring Mom - I think this would be it. For here we see Jesus love his mom so well. Let’s get into it and read from John’s account. So there it is. The solution for Mary’s isolation is companionship with John. He would now be his son, and her his mother. We get to walk through what these words mean for us as well.

About a week and a half ago was an International Woman's Day, I don't know if heard anything about it? People marching in the streets and protesting, and their goal is to support the equal rights for woman. It's a time to give voice to the noble acts of women, and what they have done or continue to do. A time to promote the nobility of the gender. On a personal note women are held in high esteem by me. I'm a man lucky enough to have an incredible mom, and fantastically amazing wife, and two daughters. On a pastoral note I know God loves men and women equally though he crafted them differently.

Well, I'm not sure your experience or thoughts, but the nobility of women and the great acts they have done was perhaps no more evident than on the day Jesus died. For there gathered at the cross what do we hear. v.25. There are 4 women, and if you're looking for a baby name it seems Mary would be a good one. And of the 12 disciples only 1 is there, the disciple we know as John. The rest? They scattered just as was prophesied. Maybe they were thinking what happened to Jesus would happen to them if they stuck around. But 4 women were gathered. Courageously stuck by Jesus in his time of need.

And we need to enter the emotional state of Mary. Here is a mom watching her son die. When it comes to grief she is perhaps has to be perhaps 3rd on the totem pole. Jesus, the Father, and Mary are grieved like none else that day. And the only difference is she doesn't have an explanation or know how this will all work out. At this moment she is bearing a bitter prophesy that was intended for her. For when she presented her son to Simeon in the temple this was said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." This sword piercing day is today. She is isolated in her pain.

But then Jesus turns to Mary and speaks. And just by the turn he says so much. For here's what God does for the isolated, he give attention. *God gives attention to the isolated.* And God who made Eve, Jesus who was and is God elevated the status of Mary. Unfortunately in that day women were not held in high esteem, some even think they were considered like property. But Jesus had a way of elevating the status of the outcast. It's just what he did. Jesus who understands like the church should understand and emulate that women are co-equal and co-heir by his actions proves nothing different. He gives attention in her moment of isolated grief.

This is the same God who gives attention to us when we are lonely or are isolated. He is the one known as, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." (Psalm 68:5). He is the one who said, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." And so the Psalmist also said, "Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly." (Ps 102:2) And the reality is that he does. He is there. He turns to us as he turns to Mary in her hour of need and grief. In fact it's why Jesus bears the cross, so we can have such access. So we can have such attention, so we can pull the ear of our Father any time we want it and know that we have it.

I consider the priceless quality of people's attention. When you have someone's attention, you have their time, you have them. There's few more priceless things you can give. Do your kids ever ask for your attention. Dad I called 3 times for you to come and see this. Come on! And then there are ways of getting attention in different ways. For example some teachers know about the naughty kids, the reason they are acting out is why? They want that

priceless attention. I consider how my cat get's my wife's attention. She'll be sleeping at 3am and start pawing at her head, pulling her hair just a bit. Or giving these small bites.

How awesome we don't need to act out, ask three times, or paw at God's head if that were possible but through Jesus Christ we have God's attention whenever we need it.

But there is more. Jesus says, "Woman, here is your son." So to someone who may have felt isolated, he provides a relationship. *God makes way for relationship for the isolated.* Ok Mary you lost a Son, here you gain a son. Let's talk about this a bit.

But before we do let me pause for a helpful tangent. There are many perceptions over who Mary is, and truly she is a good Mom, there for her Son at the cross. She is honored as mother of God. The thing is we don't believe her to be the God-mom or divine. When Jesus prays, he never prays to her. When this act of providence is given, it is a sign that God provides for Mary, not the other way around as if Mary could provide and give to God. So again here Jesus is showing his supremacy even over Mary as he provides and cares for her relationships.

I've noticed that relationships don't happen just all of a sudden, rather they take intentionality and commitment. I remember for years I wanted to be in a romantic relationship, and it didn't just happen until I was committed to pursuing it. Until I was committed to asking someone out and sticking with someone else. I think it still works the same way, you may feel isolated and alone. And though God knows and hears about our situation he also works through our pursuing. I was reminded of the intentionality of Ruth from our first lesson. She wanted to stay in relationship, be there for someone else and in turn have someone. So she said, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." (1:16) Ruth was going to pursue relationship with Naomi no matter what. Now you can't say that to everyone, especially if they just broke up with you. But it's a picture of the intentionality of pursuing relationship with others.

And as you look for lasting relationships, one of the primary ways to pursue them I believe is through the avenue of the church. He created his bride the church not just to be about one person, or an isolated Christ follower, but about a community of Christ-followers banded together. I was reading from Acts for my personal Bible study and presented this beautiful picture of community. Here it was, "44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." And you're kind of like wow that seems really, really cool. Like I want to hang out with them, I'll host tonight - we're having pizza.

So again this I believe is true *church provides an incredible opportunity for community.* God's goal is that as we meet together, not alone, we would encourage others. He want us to be praying for others, wants us to be emotionally supporting each other. Rejoicing together, crying together. And I've observed incredible community happening. At Christmas when one small group was at the Frankfort Terrace singing, and another small group picking out gifts at Target for the needy. I observe it on Facebook when you give support to those in need, or rejoice with what's happening. I see it in the conversations that happen here, and the time you spend together. Please continue relationships with others here. Pray for others here, serve with others,

spend time together. Continue to pursue relationship with others, and you will reap the blessing of community. One commentator said, "But when a church is functioning as it's supposed to, in all of its glorious messiness, it's a wonderful thing, a supernatural thing that no amount of mere neighborliness can match." (Steven Furtick) I see that happening in you.

And I wanted to invite you if you're new to Amazing Love, find community here. Get involved by serving together, showing up Sunday, you can show up even early to talk to people. Consider our small group environments as a way to enjoy relationship and community.

To carry this point on even further what this story illustrates is that *A spiritual family is (can be) stronger than a physical family.* Let me explain. What we know about Mary is that her husband Joseph is out of the picture. Tradition says he died around 15 years ago. But we also know that she has 4 other sons, and 2 other daughters. She has physical family she could have leaned on. 4 other sons! But these family members at the time were not believers in Jesus as Savior. Only one we know believed, James. And he only came around after the resurrection. So Jesus prioritizes for Mary a spiritual family over a physical one.

You know we have phrases that speak of the strength of bonds we have. One is that blood is thicker than _____. Water. I heard Rick Warren comment on this section and he said, "Grace is thicker than genetics." That physical families and those ties fade away, but spiritual family never does, and will be made permanent in heaven.

But there is a final thing Jesus is giving to Mary and to the isolated. *God gives emotional support to the isolated.* And see it's not just that he did it for Mary here, it's that he does this regularly for those who cry out to him for help.

Just this week my wife and I talk about how God gives us what we need. For my wife it is in the form of a Christian song that comes on when she needs to hear it. For me it is in the form of another pastor who speaks words of the Psalms to me to help and to guide. And I believe God has this way of working through particular avenues to continue to give us what we need.

But in doing this for Mary he also shows the length of his love. Because Jesus is in pain like no other. And the thing about pain is it always makes you concerned about you. If you've recently burned your finger on the oven, and it's giving that burning sensation for a while, you don't focus on how the kids are doing in those moments. If you're world is crumbling around you, it's really hard to focus on the needs of others. But on the day of greatest pain for Jesus, he is still able to be emotionally available to the one who needs him. He still cares about her pain. And this kind of love it's incredible, it's remarkable, it's amazing.

But now it's time for a bit of self-reflection. When you compare the way Jesus loves to the way you love do you find anything lacking? When I see Jesus give attention, I confess I haven't always been as attentive to those who needed me. When I see Jesus be there passed his pain, I'm reminded of my selfishness which is so common. When I see and we haven't really even talked about this honor and love his mom. I'm reminded of how often I've failed to keep the 4th commandment which is to honor your father and mother, and really all in authority. Do you see the discrepancy to, between the way you love and Jesus loves? If so let us repent of being inattentive, selfish, and basically unloving.

And let us look again at the author of love this day. See he is winning our salvation. He is winning it as he dies. Yes his death was necessary to pay the debt of our sins and lovelessness.

But then also see his obedience. He is fulfilling the 4th commandment for us. While we couldn't love completely and selfless our parents, he is showing the way. Keeping that commandment too for us, just as during all his life he kept the commandments perfectly in our place. And it is this combination of his death and active obedience, that speak life to us. His death gives life to our forgiveness, and his obedience gives life to our righteousness. Both were won and necessary and present that day. And they are ours through faith, forgiveness and righteousness.

But now how do we go forward loving more like Jesus. Let give you two quick considerations.

Remember to love your immediate family. Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim 5:8) Now when it comes to this usually you don't have to tell parents to provide for their kids. Parents do that pretty naturally and pretty well I might add. But as age progresses, sometimes we should clarify that kids should also provide for their parents - and this is the paradigm Jesus is setting at the cross - as this Son provides for his Mom. I think this is such a timely word because many of the most lonely in our country are the elderly, who often feel overlooked or unwanted. Maybe for us there are many perhaps in our own families who we could reach out to, to give attention, emotional support and if necessary and appropriate provide for. I wonder what dent we could put in loneliness if we big kids went away and started to do or kept doing that.

And another *find your healing in your helping.* See another paradigm that Jesus set is to look outside your pain to help someone in pain. To look outside when you're in need to meet someone else's need. And it is interesting that sometimes just by helping others, we ourselves are helped. So the next time you say, "man I really need encouragement." Go out and find someone to encourage. Tell them what a great job they did, or how good they look. See what it does. The next time you feel lonely and unnoticed, go notice someone. Maybe it's the persona with the head down and nonverbal ques saying, "I'm alone." Say, "Hey, how are you doing. I'm Dustin by the way." Make it your mission to speak love into their lives. The next time you feel unloved, go out and show love. Help someone who needs helping, and give even though you want to get. And test what this does for your own life, and see if it doesn't in fact provide some healing.

But now let me pray for us: Heavenly Father, you know me when I feel alone and when I feel secure. I thank you that you are always available for me, and have ways of speaking into my life through others. Help me to cherish the church community and find my place. Help me to help others by showing the love you have shown me. Remind me again today that I am not alone, and that you are with me. Amen.