



“Happy Together”

Text: Genesis 2:4b-25

a sermon by Kevin Fleming

September 8, 2019

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

We're back together again! The summer season has “officially” come to an end. Labor Day is past and we are now into the opening days of “pumpkin spice” season - not a liturgical season of the year, but one that seems to infect everything. The heat of summer will come and go and the coolness of the fall season will keep trying to establish a foothold.

Here, in worship, we return to the weekly narrative lectionary - that prescribed series of readings that asks us to examine some of the stories from the Old and New Testament. In the fall and right through Christmas, we spend our time in the Old Testament. From Christmas through Pentecost, we will focus on stories from the New Testament.

And what more appropriate place to start than “in the beginning”? We're in Genesis this morning, focusing our attention on the second - and much older - story of creation. Exactly how old this story is would be hard to say. We know that it is a story that comes before the Exile to Babylon. We know that it does not have the features of the first story. In fact, the story before us this morning begins with a misty, primordial world in which God creates a garden in which to place the human creature. In Genesis 1, humankind is the crowning achievement of creation. In Genesis 2, humankind is the beginning of creation. In Genesis 1, all the creatures are created before human beings. In Genesis 2, the human creature is created and then the animals. Which story is right and which is wrong? That's a pointless question.

What we want to ask of the story before us this morning is, what is trying to tell us? What's the point of the story and why does it matter? What are the people of God saying about God and what is God trying to tell us?

"Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man - the human creature - should be alone." Unlike the first story, which is about being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth and subduing it, the second story of creation seems to be about companionship. The animals and the birds are created to be the human's companions. But, there was something missing. While the animals and birds were wonderful and friendly and "company," there was still something missing. The animals were not enough like the human. So, God creates another human, somewhat different from the first, and the human is happy. The human is fulfilled. The human is content.

"It is not good that the human creature should be alone." You and I are living in the loneliest society in history. Just think about that. People are more lonely today than ever before. And that is in spite of the incredible technology at our disposal that makes communication with another easier than ever.

- The rate of anxiety and depression has steadily increased over the past 40 years.
- The rate of suicide is higher now than ever before, excluding opioid deaths.
- 40 million adults in the United States suffer from anxiety disorders, comprising 18.1% of the population *and* the evidence for a connection between anxiety and depression is mounting.

The cause of our loneliness, anxiety, and depression is three-fold. A percentage of the population experiences these challenges because they are genetically predisposed to them. Some experience these challenges because of psychological causes - trauma from childhood and youth, abuse, and more. And, significantly, the third reason we face these challenges are social causes. These concern the way we live together.

Now, I am not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, nor do I play one on television, so I really can't comment on the first two of the three-fold causes of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. But, the social causes seem to speak to me - and, I believe, they will speak to you.

How have we changed the way we live together?

- We have become disconnected from work that gives meaning and purpose.
- We have become disconnected from meaningful values. We focus on materialism and doing things purely for outward rewards instead of inward reward. As one author put it, "our square footage has gotten bigger and our circle of friends has gotten smaller."

- We have become disconnected from respect. We have come to believe that status, celebrity, and wealth are what denote success and anxiety over the loss of financial security and status often are underlying constant stress in people.
- We have become disconnected from the natural world. When we spend time in the natural world we feel ‘small’ not ‘big’, and we feel like we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. Rates of depression when exercising in the natural world, and spending time outdoors all reduce in comparison to time spent outside. We often feel ‘more alive’ when outdoors in nature.
- We have become disconnected from hope for a better future. Polls tells us that we are now living in a time when we do not believe our children will inherit a better world than we did.
- Finally, we have become disconnected from each other. Years ago, the question was asked in one study, “how many friends do you have?” The most common answer was “5.” When the same question is asked now, “how many friends do you have” the answer is “0.” None. No one to call in an emergency or a crisis. We may have 15,000 “friends” on Facebook, or 6 million followers on Twitter, but we have no one to call when life goes wrong.

“It is not good that the human creature should be alone.” God saw that we are not good when we are alone. We cannot become what God created us to be when we are alone. We have no hope of wholeness when we are alone.

“But, wait and minute,” some of you are thinking. “That’s not us. We’re not anxious or depressed. We’re church people!” I wish that were true, but the evidence runs to the contrary. *We **are*** those people.

But we have also been sent by Jesus Christ to others just like us.

- To people who are disconnected from meaning in their work and in their lives
- to those who are searching for meaningful values,
- to those looking for respect and the affirmation of their dignity,
- to those searching for hope and a better tomorrow,
- to those longing for a connection with other people -

to them, Jesus Christ commissions us to go to them - not wait for them - and offer a healing hand, a caring heart, and an open mind.

“It is not good that the human creature should be alone.” If all the experts are right, if all the studies are true, if all the books are giving it to us with clarity and veracity, then we are living in lonely times, and “it is not good that the human creature should be alone.” We need face-to-face and heart-to-heart time with others.

And we need all the sacred connections of life. We need time in meaningful and rewarding work. We need a set of relevant and substantial values that can serve as our “North Star.” We need the respect of others and the affirmation of our dignity and worth. We need hope and aspirations and dreams. We need time in the wonder and mystery of the world around us. And we need each other.

You may not believe it quite this way, but humor me. Eons ago, when our most ancient ancestors were scratching out an existence on the plains and savanna of Africa, how do you suppose they climbed to the top of the evolutionary ladder? Was it by their individual brute strength? Was it by their cunning? No. Our ancient ancestors discovered that when they banded together, when they shared power, when they cared for the well-being of others, when they formed tribes and adopted common objectives, they thrived.

In our world today, we are doing our very best to disband our tribes and destroy our communities. We practice division instead of reconnection. We look for reasons to detach, to disengage, and dissociate. And then we sit back and wonder why we are miserable.

“It is not good that the human creature should be alone.”

Put it a different way: if you want to be happy, be happy together.
For now and evermore. Amen.



First
Presbyterian
Church

609 South East Second Street
Evansville, IN 47713
(812) 423-6297

www.firstpresevansville.com

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