



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

The Loneliness of Jesus

March 9th, 2008

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

John 11

Emotions are SO important. On one extreme, they can rule our lives, when we base major decisions and outlooks on our feelings. On the other extreme, we can ignore them to the point of being handicapped in living, experiencing much less than God's best for us.

Emotions are important, because they tie into our decisions, our morals, and our spiritual lives. If we love the good and abhor the evil we are far more likely to be good. And if we hate bribes and value integrity we are far more likely to be honest. The person who will experience their life in the fullest measure is the one who can love good and hate evil. In their emotions they value what God values.

We don't think about the fact that what we like and dislike affects us so much... but advertisers do. They spend millions of dollars to *shape* our likes and dislikes. Rarely does it say blatantly that "adultery is good." But it does teach us the idea that being attractive to many people and to be quietly thrilled by turning others "on." Not all emotions are created equal...

We've been looking at the emotional life of Jesus. And we've begun with what some have called "negative" emotions, because so many of us go around with this "plastic" Jesus which is false. We never realize he was FULLY human. So it's important to see how Jesus handled the spectrum of emotions. But I want to share one more thing before we zero in on loneliness.

As you inventory your own emotions, you can categorize all your emotions into 3 kinds: Godly emotions, human emotions, and fleshly emotions.

1. Godly emotions—are those experienced by God. Compassion, joy, anger at injustice, praise, peace, worship, adoration. Appreciation of beauty.
2. Human emotions—based in our human situation & shared by Jesus during his time on earth: grief, pain, fear, abandonment, sadness, anxiety, stress, anguish, and vulnerability. For the believer they are temporary and in eternity there shall be no more crying or sadness or pain (Rev. 21:4).
3. Fleshly emotions—are poisonous and destructive and toxic, including cruelty, envy, selfish ambition, sensuality, bitterness, overpowering lusts and murderous hatred. They can come from hanging on to our human emotions too long, or letting them become all consuming. They can also be subtle, like getting one last, little comment in, to prove you're right, or to make the other person look foolish. The outcome of these emotions is spiritual death. Even the little ones. These were not part of humanity at creation and are not "natural human reactions".

Thus, the Holy Spirit *produces* our Godly emotions, *comforts* our human emotions, and *wars against* our fleshly emotions. And today, we're looking at the human emotion, the loneliness of Jesus.

Loneliness is one of the most crushing and most common of human emotions. If you have felt lonely over the last few days, or years, take it as good news: you're 100% normal! Feelings of abandonment and isolation create an overwhelming sense of helplessness and despair. People in the throes of a heightened state of loneliness often fall prey to temptations or behaviors that are extremely atypical. It is a dangerous place to

be, if you land there for a long time.

Jesus experienced loneliness many times throughout his life. Jesus was a carpenter until he was 30, and then he began his ministry. Before Jesus began his ministry, he withdrew into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. In His time in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan in a multitude of ways, including Satan's offer to create worshipers to fill the emptiness of his loneliness. He was constantly living without anyone knowing what he was doing or what he was about. And before his betrayal and crucifixion, he once again withdrew into the Garden of Gethsemane, and even his closest disciples, although they were present, were not really with him. He was alone.

Even a Messiah needs a friend. A friend is someone who doesn't show up just for the teaching, preaching, free loaves and fishes lunch; it's someone to laugh with, where you can talk about the duh moments of life... Jesus had those people too! But imagine the isolation and loneliness He went through, too.

John 14: 5 *"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'"* 6 *Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'* 8 *Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'* 9 *Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.'"*

Just like Jesus, there are times when we feel like no one understands us, let alone knows who we really are and what we're really about.

There are four times when loneliness is especially common...

First, loneliness hits hard during a time of loss. You work through it... Sometimes losses are final, and in moving back out into our world we need to form new bonds. Sometimes losses are not final, and reconciliation is possible.

There is a story told in Spain of a father and his teenage son who had a relationship that was strained for a long time, and that ultimately reached the breaking point. And so the son ran away from home. After a time his father began a journey in search of him. Finally, in Madrid, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in the daily newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon tomorrow. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office, 800 Pacos showed up. They were all seeking love and reconnection with their estranged fathers.

Second, loneliness hits hard during times when we're living "off-course," perhaps due to sin, perhaps due to old habits that die hard, perhaps due to simply living without an awareness of our deeper purpose—living apart from that to which God designed us for. When we feel lonely in this case, we can honestly assess when we've allowed ourselves to live off-track, relying on something besides God to fill us and call us and identify who we are...

Do you ever see some people that have really deep friendships, long-term friendships, like 20 or 30 years? And you go, "Man, how lucky they are." And I say to you, it is not luck at all. It is a choice. You choose to develop friendships by *making time* for them. Do you know why most of us are lonely? We don't make time for friendships. We are too busy achieving; we're too busy working; we're too busy doing other things. We're not willing to put the time into it. And in families, it's the difference between running your kids from activity to activity, and playing or working *with* them, so they get more time with you. This may be hitting you right between the eyes. And if it hurts, I'm sorry, but you've got to know. You've got to open up. After all, despite what it looks like on the map, America today is more like a group of islands, with no connection. You have to meet together and really share.

- First, we're to share our experiences. **Experiences.** The Bible says people learn from one other "*just as iron sharpens iron.*" Have you ever heard of that phrase "it's wise to learn from experience?" So

learn from the experiences of other people! You don't have time to make all the mistakes yourself. So we share our experiences.

- Second, the Bible says we're to share our **homes**. We're to share our homes. The Bible literally says in I Peter 4:9, "*open up your homes to each other.*" It doesn't say if they are really nice ones, open them up. It just says open them up. Why does God say that? Why are we to share our homes? I'll tell you why – because you cannot fellowship in a crowd. Did you know in the first 300 years of Christianity, there were no church buildings? And that, by the way, was the fastest period of growth for the church. One of the reasons we keep saying, “Go get in a small group” is because it’s biblical. It’s the difference between having someone in your formal living room and hanging with them in your kitchen.

Third, during times of isolation, when part of us may come to believe that we really are all alone. When we come to believe the myth that we really ARE all alone...

Science and religion are together on this: we are never alone. The biologist Lewis Thomas wrote that "There is no such creature as a single individual; he has no more life of his own than a cast-off cell marooned from the surface of your skin."

We are not separate beings, each encased in our own private world. Even as I speak, the particles that make up "me" are traveling through this pulpit, through the air, and into you, and you, and you. John Muir wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

We are all together in this. Jesus said, "*I will not leave you orphans.*" God's presence is with us every moment. Not only did God create all that is, but the act of creation is an *ongoing* reality. The Creator continues to create and sustain us every moment. Swedenborg says that if God ever withdrew His presence, even for a moment, everything would cease to be. We are here because God is here. And so we are never alone.

Fourth, during times of incubation, like when a seed is planted in the dirt and has yet to sprout. It’s not due to loss, or living off-course, or isolation. We’re doing just what we need to be doing, but we still find ourselves with these feelings. There are times of long, lonely battle. Think about the butterfly struggling out of its cocoon, or opening the oven too many times to check the cake, or the alone hours it took Brian to learn the guitar, or Bruce Springsteen to learn to write songs, or Brett Favre with a football. You may very well BE on the right path, but you haven’t “emerged” yet.

And God gives us each human emotion as a signal.

Anger—signals a problem, and it needs to be confronted.

Sorrow—signals a loss and reminds us how important life, and thus resurrection, is.

Frustration—signals an assumption problem, and is our sign to move to a solution.

Loneliness—signals to us we are to be vulnerable before God the Father, and re-identify ourselves in him.

Jesus knew that they would feel lonely when he left them, so he sought to reassure them that even though he was going to die, he would not leave them orphans.

He said the Holy Spirit will come and "*teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.*" At a deep soul level we are connected to all that is. At this place there is no fear, no loneliness. There is peace. Most of us don't live at that deep soul level all that often. But it is certainly a place all of us have access to, and can visit.

Theologian Kierkegaard wrote: “If an Arab in the desert were suddenly to discover a spring in his tent, and so would always be able to have water in abundance, how fortunate he would consider himself! So it is, too, when a man who as a physical being is always turned toward the outside, thinking that his happiness lies outside him, finally turns inward and discovers that the source is within him--not to mention his discovery that the source is his relation to God.”

The feeling of loneliness, while painful, is not something we need fear. It can be a sign to us that it is time for us to visit the home of our soul, where God lives with us. If we ferret out its messages and follow its direction, our feelings of loneliness can actually bring us a greater experience of connection and peace.

Jesus shows us that loneliness and solitude really are the same thing. As long as we reject the one to embrace the other, we will never get it. We cannot reject loneliness and aspire to spend time in blissful solitude.

I think we must embrace loneliness. We must let ourselves be overcome with loneliness and vulnerability. Make ourselves totally available to loneliness until our ego is swallowed up in the vastness of it and we know – beyond any shadow of doubt – that we are not alone, that we never have been alone and never will be.

Dear Lord, as we struggle with our feelings of loneliness, may we remember that you went through these intense feelings too. Thank you for never giving up, for walking through your feelings, until your mission was accomplished: that enabled you to send your Holy Spirit to us to be our Comforter, our Encourager. Thank you for leaving us peace, not as the world gives, but as only you can.