

Freedom to be Alone

Grace, Mercy and peace are now yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

I think the word - alone- has gained a new meaning for many of us these past few days. I don't think it is too far off the mark to say that we have been trying to come to terms with what it means to be isolated from the people that we see each and every day. The aloneness can feel like a relief for some, the real threat of getting sick is minimized while alone, maybe this alone time is a welcome reprieve from going into an office, or this is just time with the family usually lost in the week. A quick glance around social media and it seems that during this shut down people have tried cooking out of their pantry, finishing tasks that have been putting off for years or picking up a new hobby to try. People spend this alone time in many different ways.

For others this time of being alone doesn't bring the levity it does for others. This time alone is dark and hurtful. Maybe looking at the same four walls every day is driving you mad, missing those for whom you have a connection with. Maybe being home feels more like a trap instead of a paradise as your mind races for all the other places you would rather be. Maybe even being home is a reminder of what is going wrong in these last few days, or even a symptom of a changed life that will not end after this lockdown.

In whatever way we have been experiencing this time alone - There is no doubt that each of us have experienced more time alone these last few days than we ever thought we would. From being stuck at home, walking the empty isles of stores, working in empty office buildings and the cancellation of social events, we are stuck with ourselves more and more. For better or for worse we are beginning to understand truly what this word alone means.

We are continuing on with our sermon series called "Freedom to..." where we are looking at our congregation and the ministry and mission that God has put forth for us to live out in the world. Today we are going to be looking at it through the lens of being alone. Freedom to be alone seems like a strange way to think about God and His mission for the church. In fact at first glance it seems almost counterproductive. If God wants us to share the story of His son and to love and to care for the world - how does being alone fit into that picture? As we think of the church and its mission we draw to mind the very public and very in community nature of our faith.

We gather together as the church to worship our God, like we are doing now. We gather together to hear His word preached, we gather together when we baptize, we gather together to kneel and receive communion. In fact, the more we think about the church the more the term alone seems to be at the opposite end of the spectrum. The public acts, the community of believers all seem to be plural and we are looking for the alone.

So in this new world of time alone - How are we to be Christians? What does it look like to be free to be alone?

Throughout the Gospels Jesus establishes a rhythm to life that we see played out through the chapters of the different gospels. Jesus will go away by himself and spend time alone, spend time in solitude during his public ministry. A quick skim of the gospels highlights this: When Jesus chooses the 12 disciples in Luke's Gospel, he spends the night praying in solitude. After multiplying the loaves of bread in Mark's Gospel, Jesus goes up the mountain to be alone, to pray. Before Peter confesses Jesus as Christ in Luke 9 Jesus returns from solitude and prayer. Jesus does this so often that on his return from a time of prayer the disciples ask Him to teach them to pray in Luke 11, Then Jesus teaches them the Lord's Prayer. The rhythm continues up to the point of the crucifixion. The night Jesus was betrayed - he kept going off to be alone, in the garden of gethsemane, our Gospel reading for today.

This time to be alone, this solitude is not foreign to the faith at all. In fact, it is a critical element of our lives as Christians. There is a time to be alone and a time to be together in community. These past few days have really highlighted for us this time to be alone. St. Paul in our epistle reading shows us how this alone or personal and community are actually one. In one sense as a Christian you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, you walk in him, you are rooted and built up in him and established in the faith. These are things of your heart, How Christ has bought you with His precious blood, baptized you into the family of God and made you a forgiven and redeemed child of God. Yet at the same time this personal aspect of faith is not done in a vacuum, but rather in a community of believers, Paul writes: you are also knitted together in love with the rest of the body of Christ. Being rooted and built in Jesus believing in Christ as our savior, means that each and every one of us are connected, we are all made one body together in Christ.

So where one is, Christ and the church is also. And where the many are gathered together so is the one rooted in Christ. In our homes, as we are alone, as we spend these dark days alone in our homes, we are a member of the body of Christ. The church is knitted together in love with us as well. We are one in Christ. Our alone time and our community life are woven together and bound up in one another in Jesus. So that what happens in our community of believers impacts you and what happens in our alone time, impacts our community of faith.

In other words, our time in community together prepares us to be alone. Think of all the sermons you have heard, the baptism you received, the Lord's table you kneeled at all the bible studies you have attended, the confirmation class you went through, what brothers and sisters in Christ have spoken or done for you. All of these and more have shaped you. The faith that has developed within community personally impacts you. Through the actions of God in the community you receive Jesus, you are rooted

and built in him and established in the faith. God has spoken to you, taught you and given you life giving faith in Jesus through this community of faith.

Now as we are separated from this community as we increasingly live life at home alone, the faith that has taken root in us lives. Living in the rhythm that Jesus gave as an example, we take time in solitude to listen at the foot of our God, and the Christ that we have been rooted into comes to us through His word. We have been made children of God, knitted into the body of Christ and now in our solitude we turn to Him. This season of Lent is an especially important to take this time of solitude to reflect on Jesus and His word. This time of solitude allows us to reflect on our lives to turn inward and to look at ourselves how we truly are. Knowing our deepest secrets and sins we look to God's word and we see the price of our sins. We realize the cost of our sin and unfaithfulness as we see Jesus journey to the cross. We realize it is for those deepest secrets and sins that our walked to Calvary.

In our solitude we see that it is Christ standing alone on trial for us, sentenced to death. We see Christ beaten and spit on alone for us. We Christ killed alone for us. As we reflect on ourselves and our deepest sins alone, we are confronted with Christ crucified for them. Yet we are also confronted with the empty tomb - Where Christ is the first born into new life. We see Christ rising that we will not be alone - but rather united with him and all believers in Christ.

You see this time in solitude reflecting on God's word drives us to community. As we sit alone at the feet of our savior, the one who died and rose for our sins who brought us into this community of believers - we join together with one another to celebrate the gifts of the one who we are rooted into. We join together in love because we first have been loved. We redeemed children of God - join the body of Christ to worship the one who has saved us. Our time alone sitting at the feet of Jesus drives us to live in community with one another in love.

So as you sit alone these next days as we await the end of the pandemic. I invite you in the midst of your time with family, baking and project finishing, or in the midst of the darkness of being alone, to take some time and to sit at the foot of Jesus. To gather at his feet to listen to God's word. Read through John's Gospel and hear what our savior has to say. It can bring hope, a call for repentance or even new insight into what our savior has done for us. As our savior speaks to us through His word - listen.

After listening to our savior, Pray over what you have read. Go to God in prayer over His word. Then Lift up the many in our community and in Las Vegas who are in need of God's assistance.

Take some time alone in solitude so that when we come together again as a community, we greet each other face to face with the love of God we found in our solitude.

In Jesus name, Amen