

# “God In the Midst of Loneliness”

James 4:6-8

September 23, 2012

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Many have observed that, despite being the most technologically advanced generation the world has ever seen, we are also the loneliest generation there has ever been. We are more networked because of technology than any other generation. Yet we are also more isolated because of technology than any other generation. Why is this? It doesn't seem to make sense.

It used to be that, in order to “network” with anyone, you had to actually go to their house and meet them face to face. Later, you could use the telephone to call a person which was a little less personal, but not bad. However, if you were driving around and wanted to interact with someone, you still had to go over to a person's house because the telephone was back home connected to the wall. With the coming of cell phones, we really didn't ever have to see anyone face to face. We could call them from anywhere. Then came texting. With texting, we don't have to see people *and* don't have to talk to people. It's all become a stream of impersonal words on a screen. I've talked to young people today who text people they've never met or even talked to. Not only this, they don't even understand why anyone would want to speak to someone on they phone when they could text. No wonder people are lonely.

We could blame the technology, but it's really not the machines' fault. Technology in and of itself is not sinful. In our narcissistic pride, we use it to isolate ourselves and care only for our wants and needs. Each of us can live in our own separate worlds, as long we have our iPhone, iPad, and iPod and an internet connection and many of us choose to do so. In a recent Newsweek article entitled, “*Is the Web Driving Us Crazy?*”, it notes the following:

In less than the span of a single childhood, Americans have merged with their machines, staring at a screen for at least eight hours a day, more time than we spend on any other activity including sleeping. Teens fit some seven hours of screen time into the average school day; 11, if you count time spent multitasking on several devices.

Meanwhile, texting has become like blinking: the average person, regardless of age, sends or receives about 400 texts a month, four times the 2007 number. The average teen processes an astounding 3,700 texts a month, double the 2007 figure.

How did we get to this point? God did not create people to live lonely isolated lives. God created people to live together in community. He made people to live with Him and with each other. The first people – Adam and Eve - were not lonely and it wasn't just because the internet had not been invented yet. They were not lonely because they enjoyed perfect face-to face fellowship with God and with each other.

But that changed. People destroyed that relationship and loneliness resulted. Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned. They broke God's Law and ate the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. What was the first thing they did after they sinned? They left God. When the Lord came near to them, they hid. They were guilty and ashamed of their sin. They were all alone. They were separated from God and separated from each other and that caused them to be lonely.

Ever since then, the same thing happens. We sin and break God's Laws. We leave God in order to sin or, having sinned, we leave God to try and hide from Him in our guilt. So we are separated from Him because of sin.

We live the prideful lives that James condemns in our text, fighting with each other and fighting with ourselves. We think only of ourselves – our desires and our needs – and retreat from one another. Technology did not cause that. It is only a symptom of our ever widening separation from each other. We find ourselves to be very lonely.

But God still loved us. We left Him, but God did not abandon us. God decided to come near to us. How near did He come? He came so near to us that He became one of us. He accepted flesh and blood and became a person just like you and me: Jesus Christ. One of His names is Emmanuel which describes Him. That name means "God with us."

Jesus came here to bring us back to God. Jesus lived the unselfish and humble life which we have not. Jesus suffered the punishment due for selfishness, pride, fighting, and all other sins by

dying on a cross. He proved God's acceptance of His sacrifice and showed His victory over sin, death, and hell by rising from the dead to life again.

Our text reminds us that God opposes the proud and, if we want to stand proud and apart from Jesus, then we will be eternally opposed by God. But, the text says, He "gives grace to the humble." Coming to Him in repentance, we receive His gifts of grace. Jesus' unselfish and humble life is credited to us in place of our selfish and prideful lives before the eyes of God. Jesus' sacrifice for sin on the cross is presented to God on our behalf and we receive forgiveness for all our sin. Jesus' victory over death is promised to us when we face death. Through the forgiveness of sin, we are united with God once again. You have no reason to ever feel lonely again. I have no reason to ever feel lonely again. All Christians in the world have no reason to ever feel lonely.

Yet we do feel lonely at times, right? Sometimes we feel that other people don't care about us and that God Himself has abandoned us. I remember seeing a poster that said: "If you feel that God is far away, guess who moved?" What was the point of that poster? When we feel alone, we think the reason is that *God* has moved from us. But that's wrong! When Christians - you and I - feel lonely, the reason is that *we* have moved away from God. We do that when we sin. When we are far from God, we feel lonely -- separated from Him and from one another.

Our text for today gives us some good news. James wrote his epistle to people who felt very lonely. They had formerly lived in Jerusalem, but had to scatter because their faith in Jesus caused people to persecute them. They felt very alone and lonely. James tells them, "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*"

That is the only way to defeat loneliness: draw nearer to God. How do we draw near to God? We know God is in every place. He is in our homes and our jobs. He is in the mountains, the plains, and the seas. Yet here in this church, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, draws near to us in a special way. When we come here to God, He comes to us.

When God's people assemble together, Jesus Christ is in the midst of us. We can't see Him. We can't touch Him. Yet He is here in our worship service. Long ago, He promised us, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matt. 18:20) We have no reason to feel lonely. Jesus, the Son of God, is here among us. We have His comfort and encouragement.

Sometimes, when you are lonely, it's nice to hear a friend speak to you (despite what texters might say). To hear a comforting and encouraging word helps you not to be so lonely. Here, in the divine service, Jesus comes to us and He speaks to us. One time, a young student asked me, "When you go to church, does God speak to you?" I said, "Yes." The student's jaw dropped. Then I explained, "Jesus speaks to us when I read the Bible." These are His words, given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is speaking to us right now -- through me. When Jesus sent out His disciples to preach and teach, He said, "He who listens to you listens to me." (Luke 10:16) Jesus meant that people who listened to His chosen preachers were actually hearing Him. When I preach, Jesus is guiding me and you hear Him through me. You hear the condemnation of your sin and its punishment. But, more importantly, you hear Good News of God's full forgiveness of your sins because of Jesus. You also hear God's guidance for your lives, showing you how to live as He wants. We have no reason to feel lonely. Our friend, Jesus, is here speaking to us, comforting us and encouraging us.

Jesus is here among us in an even more intimate way. Jesus gives us more than His presence and His words. Jesus gives us Himself. On the night before He died, Jesus took bread and wine. He said, "Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Take and drink. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this to remember me." We obey Jesus command to "do this" here in our church. We take bread and wine, believing Jesus' promise. He *is* here: His body with the bread; His blood with the wine. The forgiveness which He won on the cross -- He gives us here in the Lord's Supper in a way we can see, touch, and taste. We have no

reason to feel lonely. Jesus is with us in the Supper, forgiving our sins, comforting our hurts, and strengthening our faiths.

When we draw near to God and He draws near to you, we become closer to Him and that helps us not to be lonely. But, as we become closer to Him, we also become closer to each other. We are not mere members of an organization. We are brothers and sisters in a family - God's family. God calls us together as a family to receive His love and share it with each other. We are here to love each other. God gives us His forgiveness. We are here to forgive each other. God encourages us in our lives. We are here to encourage each other when we feel sad and support each other when we feel lonely. We should never feel lonely because we have God first and each other.

People sometimes ask, "Do I have to go to church?" And I wonder why anyone would not want to. We come here because God has already drawn near to us in His Son, Emmanuel, God With us. We draw near to God because He has promised to draw near to us. And He has. He is present in the midst of our worship. His voice speaks to us in His Word. His body and blood are given to eat and drink for the reception of forgiveness. You can try to live without God and not come to His Church and you will probably continue to feel the pressure, the problems, and the loneliness. Or, you can live with God and come to His Church. You will still have the pressure and the problems, but you need not have the loneliness. Draw near to God and He *will* draw near to you. Amen.