

Sermon for Sunday, January 15, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"ESCAPE FROM LONELINESS"

Text: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

St. Matthews 26:29

Do you ever get lonely--even when you are with people? I know I do. Sometimes you can be with a crowd of people and at the same time feel so isolated and alone. Sometimes you can be talking to people, laughing and joking, and yet your face feels stiff because you are wearing a mask and deep down, inside, you feel all cold and lonely. At times like that we wish we could have deep, open, warm and honest relationships with people--relationships where we can dare to be ourselves, dare to be who and what we really are and know that we would still be loved and accepted. You know, it's a funny thing, but we try to be what we think other people want us to be or we try to be what other people admire. Therefore, we are always wearing a mask and we never let other people see what we're really like deep inside and that real us inside frequently is lonely.

Dr. Paul Tournier, a Swiss Psychiatrist, tells of the secretary who goes home and every night she turns on her radio just as the program for the day is ending. And why would she turn on her radio just as a station is getting ready to go off the air? Because she is desperately lonely and she just wants to hear a human voice wish her good night. Yes, loneliness. I remember visiting an elderly parishioner once who had just lost his wife. As we talked suddenly he began to cry, "O God," he said, "sometimes I think I can't stand the loneliness."

Let me suggest two ways the Lord's supper can help meet that need and can help overcome that loneliness in our lives. The first way it can help is to remind us of the presence of Jesus. Here at the Holy Table are tangible and visible symbols of Jesus, his body and his blood. The last thing Jesus ever said to his disciples was this, "Lo, I am with you always..." Whoever you are this morning, you are important to Jesus. You see, Jesus didn't die for people in general, he died for people in particular--he died for individuals. I remember reading a story once about a little girl who went to a parade with her Dad. She particularly wanted to see the clowns. After the parade had passed by she began to cry. "What's the matter, honey?" asked her Dad, "Didn't you see those funny clowns when they passed by?" "Yes", sobbed the little girl, "But they didn't see me." We are like that. We like to be noticed. We like for people to know our names.

A British doctor recently said that he seemed to treat a larger proportion of housemaids than any other occupation. He said it wasn't that they were sicker than anyone else, but in the home they were treated as a part of the function of the home. When they came to his office they were treated as persons of worth and it was so important to them to be recognized as persons. And wasn't that always the way with Jesus? Do you remember the blind beggar named Bartemaeus who cried out to Jesus? The crowd told him to be quiet. Why, he wasn't important enough to be noticed by Jesus! Yet, Jesus stopped and called the blind Bartemaeus to him. Or remember the woman in the crowd who felt so unimportant and insignificant that she didn't want to bother Jesus, but she felt if she could just touch the hem of his garment unnoticed, she would be healed. Yet, Jesus stopped and in the midst of the crowd said, "who touched me." She was important to him. So whoever you are this morning, the Lord's supper means that you are important to Jesus. He knows your name.

Sometimes in counseling I will have someone who is very discouraged and has a very low self-image. "How can God be interested in me or care about me?" they will ask. Well, that is the miracle, isn't it? I've had people say, "well, pastor, I can't be a Christian, I don't believe in the virgin birth, I don't believe Jesus walked on water, I don't believe he fed the multitude with a few loaves of bread." Well, I'll tell you that kind of a miracle doesn't bother me. The miracle I have trouble realizing is the miracle that God loves me and he knows my name. You are important to God. He knows your name. This table is for you, personally.

The second thing we can learn at the table of the Lord that will help our loneliness is the fact that it is a meal of fellowship. It is a fellowship with all of us here together this morning. There is a unique sense of belonging as we take this supper together for we are people who together claim Jesus as our Lord. And it doesn't matter if we are young or old, black or white, man or woman or child, we are a family of God together.

But there is another sense in which this meal is a fellowship that spans the ages. We are in fellowship with those saints of the past and of the future, too. Sometimes I come in here to the sanctuary by myself during the week. I'll sit out there in one of the pews by myself and I'll pray a while. And then I'll sit there and look around at this lovely building and I'll try to picture how it was ten years ago, twenty years, forty years ago. I'll try to imagine what the church looked like down on Delmar--or try to imagine that first little group of men and women who banded together to organize a church and called it Central Presbyteri. Later on in the service when I pour the wine into the chalice, I'll remember it came to us across many years and many other hands have touched it. Then I'll have a sense of warm fellowship and deep gratitude for those saints of yesterday who built this church, who worshipped here, and I feel a sense of their presence and I know then what the Bible means when it talks about the communion of saints.

The other night at the Session meeting the Elders voted on some names for our new buildings. They voted to call the new education building the Mauze Children's Building because two Mauzes--father and son--gave many years of their lives serving this congregatinn. And then they came to name the new multi-purpose room in the new facilities. That particular building will have many uses--it will be a gym, a play area, a dining area, a meeting area. So they decided to call it a Hall and then they gave it a name. They called it Founders Hall--named in memory of those devoted men and women who began our church way back in 1844 and in memory of the pastors who served the church over the years. I like that, don't you--Founders Hall. The other day I was putting together material for a plaque to go on the wall and was listing the men who had served as pastors over those 134 years. Can you imagine the struggles those people had over the years? One pastor died during the plague--they struggled through the Civil War and reconstruction--through World War I, through World War II, through the Great Depression--and they left us this great heritage.

Then I think not only of the past but of the future and what we will leave for our children and our children's children. Then I feel a part of a great family of God. I am not alone any more for as I sit here in the sanctuary by myself, I am surrounded by a great crowd of witnesses, by a host of those who went before me, who witnessed a good confession, and who have achieved the crown of life.

And that's what the Lord's supper means--that's why it is an escape from loneliness--it means that Jesus knows my name and I am important to him. It means I am a part of a mighty host, a great family of God. We belong to each other because we all belong to Him.