

The Lord of the Lonely

Psalm 68:6 -- "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

Psalm 68:6 (From Moffatt's Translation) -- "The God who brings the lonely home. . ."

I. THE LORD OF THE LONELY

- Every man has at some point experienced loneliness.

William Penn -- *"They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it."*

- At Christmastime men and women everywhere gather in their churches to wonder anew at the greatest miracle the world has ever known. And with that I begin this true story. It happened in December of 1953. It happened to a pastor who was very young.
- His church was very old. Once, long ago, it had flourished. Great men had preached in its pulpit. Great saints had prayed at its altars. People from all walks of life had worshipped there and that was one of the things that made it so beautiful.
- But the good days had passed from this section of town where it stood. But the pastor and his young wife believed in their run-down church. They felt that with paint, hammer and faith they could get it back into shape. Together they began the wholesome task.
- But in late December, a severe storm whipped through the river valley, and the worst blow fell on the little church--a huge chunk of rain soaked plaster fell off the inside wall just behind the altar. Sorrowfully, the pastor and his wife swept away the mess, but they couldn't hide the ragged hole.

- That afternoon the dispirited couple attended an auction held for the benefit of the youth group. The auctioneer opened a box and shook out a handsome gold-and-ivory lace tablecloth. But it, too, dated from a long vanished era. There were a few half-hearted bids. Then the pastor seized on the idea with what he thought was a great idea. He bid it in for \$6.50.
- He carried the cloth back to the church and tacked it up on the wall behind the altar. It completely hid the hole! And the extraordinary beauty of its shimmering handwork cast a fine holiday glow over the altar.
- Just before noon on Christmas Eve, as the pastor was opening the church, he noticed a woman standing in the cold at the bus stop. “The bus won’t be here for forty minutes!” he called and invited her into the warmth of the church. She told him that she had come from the city that morning to be interviewed for a job as a housekeeper to one of the wealthy families in the town, but she had been turned down. She was a war refugee, and her English was imperfect.
- The woman sat down in a pew, chafed her hands and rested. After a while she dropped her head and prayed, quietly but desperately. She looked up as the pastor began to adjust the great ivory-and-gold lace cloth across the whole. She rose suddenly and walked up the steps. She looked at the tablecloth. The young pastor smiled and started to tell her about the storm damage but she didn’t seem to listen. She took up a fold of the cloth and rubbed it between her fingers.
- “It is mine!” she said. “It is my banquet cloth!” She lifted the corner and showed the surprised pastor that there were initials monogrammed on it. “My husband had the cloth made especially for me in Brussels!”
- For the next few minutes she talked excitedly. She explained that she was from Vienna; that she and her husband had opposed the Nazis and had decided to leave the country. They were advised to go separately to decrease the risk of being captured.

- They planned that he would join her as soon as he could arrange to ship their household goods across the border.
- She never saw him again. Later she learned that he had died in a concentration camp. “I have always felt it my fault--to leave without him,” she said. “Perhaps all these years of wandering have been my punishment.”
- The pastor tried to comfort her and urged her to take the cloth with her. She refused. Then she went away.
- As the church begin to fill on Christmas Eve, it was clear that the cloth was going to be a great success. It had been skillfully designed to look its best by candlelight.
- After the service, the young pastor stood in the doorway; many people told him that the church looked beautiful. One gentle-faced, middle-aged man--he was the local watch repairman, looked rather puzzled.
- “It is strange,” he said in a soft accent. “Many years ago my wife--God rest her--and I owned such a cloth. In our home in Vienna, my wife put it on the table”--here he smiled-- “only when the pastor came to dinner.”
- The pastor suddenly became very excited. He told the jeweler about the woman who had been in the church earlier in the day.
- The startled jeweler clutched the pastor’s arm. “Can it be? Does she live?” Together the two got in touch with the family who had interviewed her. Then in the pastor’s car, they started for the city. And as Christmas Day was born, this man and his wife--who had been separated through so many sad Christmas Days--were reunited. To those who heard the story, the joyful purpose of the storm that knocked the hole in the wall of the church was now quite clear. (Focus on the Family Magazine)
 - Think now for a moment of all the lonely days that were spent, hungering for fellowship, for conversation, for that simple feeling

of nearness to someone else. Loneliness creates insatiable feelings of hunger in the heart.

***Psalm 42:1-2** -- "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"*

***Psalm 84:2** -- "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."*

II. THE LONELY PEOPLE OF THE GOSPELS

- When we observe the people who surrounded the Lord, we notice that there are some of them who for one reason or another were lonely people.

A. Mary, the Loneliness of Love

- In the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, we find the loneliness of her love for her Son. Joseph died sometime during the childhood of Jesus.
- If this unfortunate event had not have occurred Mary might have been spared of her loneliness. She could have turned to Joseph when things were difficult. But because he was gone, Mary was left alone, to love, to ponder, and to be brokenhearted.
- She could not seek advice or support from her own family because they thought that Jesus was mad.
- If you love something deeply enough over the course of time, you will be hurt. Every mother knows something of this as her children get older. There comes a day when the most perfect mother will have to make room for others to come into the heart of her child.
- But consider Mary who was unable to protect her Son from the slanderers who called the Lord a devil and said that madness lurked in

his mind.

- Consider the loneliness of Mary when she was powerless to prevent any of the defeating acts that accompanied the crucifixion. Love is the fountain of the deepest loneliness. What could she do when He uttered that last pitiful cry?

B. Thomas, the Loneliness of Doubt

- Thomas is found in the loneliness of doubt. Thomas is always a man who is by himself. Doubters usually are. Their negative thoughts separate them from everyone else.
- On the evening of the Resurrection, Thomas was not there. He was a lonely man on that day. He may have been wandering about the Garden of Gethsemane, with wonderful memories in his mind but faith absent in his heart. Doubt is often the mother of loneliness.
- To a certain degree, whether we are willing to admit it or not, we all have a little bit of Thomas in us. It is one of the prices, I suppose, of living.
 - Paychecks that stretch to make ends meet.
 - Struggling with a supervisor who generally makes life difficult.
 - Worry, fear, and anxious moments about future events.
 - Trying to manage sick children.
 - Working to do all the “right” things to be successful.
- Pretty soon, our doubt chokes out the relationship with God. That lack of relationship broadens the scope of loneliness.

C. The Man at The Pool of Bethesda, Loneliness in the Crowd

- The man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5, had lain there for thirty-eight years. As the years had passed he had lost his friends.
- At the heart of all of that was the stir and whirl of activity and he was there, a lonely sufferer by the pool.

D. Judas, the Loneliness of Sin

- Judas was confined by the loneliness of sin. Having received the sop at the Last Supper, he went out immediately into the night. He was not driven from the table. He did not have to endure the rage of the Master. There were no clenched fists that he had to guard against.
- Sin is disruptive in its very nature. It shatters homes and disintegrates relationships.
- Why was it that the Lord in that perfect parable spoke of one sheep going astray? Why not five, or fifty? It is from the parables that the Lord always taught us about the loneliness of sin and how it affects one.
 - One coin.
 - One sheep.
 - One boy off to the far country.
 - One man tossed into a ditch after a fight with thieves.
 - One woman at a well.

III. CONCLUSION -- THE LORD OF THE LONELY

- This week, I have met the following lonely people:
- One man, 56, who has been retired for only six months and a biopsy shows that he will not be alive in 1 ½ to 2 years at most.
- Another man, 65, who has been struggling with cancer since 1997, finds that it has returned, this time to the lungs, he will live for six months if he is blessed.
- A woman whose twenty-three year old daughter had to move back in with her because her marriage of five years collapsed under the weight of

immorality. A five-year old child is also involved.

- A pastor that I sat up with until two A.M early Saturday morning weeping because of the lack of growth in his church and the unbearable financial pressures that he is facing.
 - Loneliness has a way of eroding even the best of our intentions. But there is a God who has a way of bringing the lonely back home again.