

HUMILIATION AND LONELINESS

Psalm 46
Philippians 2:3-11
Mark 15:25-34

We continue with the Lent series we started last week and let me remind you that the purpose of this series is to not only deepen our love for Jesus but in an even greater way help us appreciate the amazing truth of His ability to enter into and empathize with every form of human experience.

This journey is meant to help us reflect on the fact that God is intensely interested in helping us through the hurts and sorrows that are part of our life – we started by looking at how Jesus is able to lead us through our struggle with temptation - this morning I want us to look at how Jesus can help us cope with the experience of humiliation and loneliness.

Let me reiterate that Jesus is able to help us cope because He experienced both humiliation and loneliness first-hand - Jesus can truly say to us “I know how you feel” because he’s been there – He’s got the T-shirt.

The passages we read this morning speak of Christ’s humiliation and intense loneliness.

In Philippians 2 we read of the Creator subjecting Himself to the most astonishing humiliation by becoming a human being – and what’s more, being the servant of human beings.

The New Living Translation put it like this:

“Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form.”

Charles Spurgeon, one of the great preachers of yesteryear, said this about it, “For God to become a man was more humiliation than for an angel to become a worm”.

On the cross Jesus was insulted and mocked by those He created and just before He died we are given a glimpse of His intense loneliness (Mark 15:34):

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus was not only forsaken by humanity – but also by God.

When He took the sin of the world on Himself – a holy God - who could have nothing to do with sin, had to turn away – in that moment Jesus experienced the consequence of sin – separation from God.

In atoning for our sin Jesus experienced real abandonment – He was entirely alone on the cross - and so understands the intense pain and suffering of loneliness.

Dr Sangster, the famous Methodist preacher, put it like this:

“It mattered to all the world that He died for love, but no single soul in the world understood that He was doing it. He was lonely with the awful loneliness of God.”

Friends, all of this means that God through Jesus Christ wants to be with us in our moments of humiliation and loneliness – He wants to offer grace to help us be overcomers because He knows the terrible consequences of this human experience.

Humiliation and loneliness can leave one feeling less than human – it can erode one’s dignity and sense of self-worth – it leads to low self-esteem – a condition that can prevent one from experiencing the abundant life that Jesus came to give – indeed died for.

Friends, those who experience this are not just people out there – they are people we know – people we work with – people we sit next to at church – people we have fellowship with.

In fact, it's you and me because we all have faced humiliation to some degree – we all at some stage have to settle the issue of self-worth – we all struggle with feelings of low self-esteem - and the lingering question that often confronts us is “Who cares?”

Well, we need to hear very clearly this morning that Jesus cares.

He might not prevent us from experiencing humiliation and loneliness – it's part of the human condition which will confront us until the day we die – but Jesus does want to walk with us through it so that the pain of it is not incapacitating.

The question that remains is, “How does Jesus walk with us through it?”

There are a number of ways – but the one I really want to focus on this morning is through His Body – the Church.

You see, as the Body of Christ we are called to be present to others in a way that reflects the love of Christ - we are to be the expression of the loving care of Jesus to those around us who are perhaps struggling with the experience of humiliation and loneliness.

Paul said it well (Philippians 2:3-4):

“When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.”

There are a few things we need to take note of here.

The first is – in our conversation we must be thoughtful and careful.

Our conversation must be seasoned with tenderness and kindness.

Does our conversation build up rather than break down?

Does what we say make people feel valued?

Jesus was often found in conversation with the outcasts of society – with those whose dignity and self-worth had been eroded – because He wanted to let them know how important and precious they were as people to God.

Sometimes all that someone needs is a little encouragement.

When you are prompted to say a kind word to someone or commend someone for something well done don't dismiss it – it is very often a prompting from Holy Spirit who knows the need of every heart and you may just be the channel through which God wants to impart His grace and peace.

If there's one place where people should receive encouragement it's in the church – because the world can be very discouraging.

We live in a culture that is rife with competition – a lot of the time people look to get ahead by breaking others down.

In society there are many who feel worthless and unimportant simply because their voice is not heard – they are discarded by society and they are left feeling humiliated and lonely.

Friends, in God's family it should not be this way – in God's family everyone matters – and our conversation should show that.

Secondly – we must develop a spirit of gratitude as a way of life.

In the context of a community that builds self-esteem in others, this has to do with what is good enough.

In a culture of excellence, we must let people know that their best is good enough – whatever they do – if it's their best - and not what we think should be their best – then it's acceptable.

I'm not suggesting that we don't strive to do things well – or that we settle for mediocrity – what I do want to say is that we must be aware that excellence easily becomes perfection and when perfection is demanded we can create the situation where people exclude themselves because they feel they will just never measure up – they feel that they're not good enough and so they withdraw.

Friends, in our being together we must strive to create a safe environment where we are willing to accept that making mistakes and failure is never the end.

People need to know that even though they may make mistakes or fail - they are still accepted and appreciated for who they are.

The world doesn't tolerate failure and that's probably why we are so afraid of it – the fear of failure often be a hindrance to exploring new things that God wants to do in and through us.

When we are tempted to write someone off because they've failed let's remember how often the Lord has forgiven us and how many times He's allowed us to start again.

Our conversation and our showing gratitude must however always be sincere and genuine – it's not flattery or trying to manipulate people to do what we want.

If we are to really be a community that builds self-esteem in others and makes them feel that they have a rightful place on earth – that they are not here by accident – then they must know that we honestly mean what we say, and that the motivation of our heart is not selfish ambition but their best interest.

Thirdly – to be a community that builds self-esteem in others – we must show compassion through acts of kindness.

In one of John's letters to the early church he says (1 John 3:18):

“My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring.”

James said that true faith is expressed through action.

Paul says (Galatians 6:2):

“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Now there are many ways one can do this – and it's sometimes just the simple things that really matter – like an arm around the shoulder of a friend when you notice that they are not as cheerful as usual – or offering a listening ear when someone needs to share a burden – or simply being willing to pray with someone when they're going through a trying time – or making time in our busy schedules to visit someone we know is lonely - all of these show the person that you value them – that they matter to you enough for you to give them some of your time and attention - the gift of time is probably one of the greatest gifts we can give anyone - it really does go a long way in building self-esteem.

In ending I want to remind us again that we are not alone in our struggle with humiliation and loneliness.

In Psalm 46 we are promised God's help.

We read that, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

He is a powerful God – the Lord of hosts befriends us – the God who created all things and who holds the nations in His hand tells us that we are valued enough to be His friends – God calls each of us His child and that tells me I'm worth something.

He is also a personal God – the God of Jacob – protects us, is our refuge.

You only protect someone who means something to you – God is telling us that we mean something to Him and that we are worth protecting – so much so that He died to protect us.

In this relationship with our all-powerful and personal God we are treated with dignity – we are loved – we are listened to and spoken to with tenderness – we experience safety and intimacy.

This is how God builds self-worth in us and what we experience we are able to share with others – Paul says, “We must have the same attitude as Christ – who took on the role of servant”.

In verses 4-5 of Psalm 46, God confirms His presence with us right now – this is His world – He is not an occasional tourist here – He has set up His habitation with us right where the humiliation and loneliness is and He knows we are vulnerable – we can struggle with low self-esteem so easily.

I want to invite those who need prayer to come to the rail after the service.

If God has touched a painful spot in your life:

- maybe you've experienced a lack of appreciation or affection or encouragement and you're struggling with low self-esteem
- maybe God has challenged you to focus more on building others up in your relationships – remember the Lord of hosts is here to help.

The psalmist tells us to come and see the works of the Lord, He makes war to cease – is there a war in your heart this morning – come and see how He destroys the weapons of the one who wants you to believe that you are useless and worthless – the one who keeps you in bondage so that you are not free to help others.

Jesus knows the pain of humiliation and loneliness – He is able to give you the resources to cope – you don't have to journey through it alone.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you became human and suffered humiliation and loneliness just like us.

You do not simply offer us heavenly wisdom – but the sympathy and understanding that come from earthly experience.

You are truly a wonderful Saviour. Amen.

Bible Study Group Questions

Was there anything that came out of Sunday's sermon that you would like to discuss or comment on?

Read Philippians 2:1-11 / Mark 15:25-34

1. What do you think it was like for Jesus to leave heaven and become human?
2. In what ways did Jesus experience humiliation and loneliness?
3. Describe Christ's attitude to His humiliation.
4. In what sense is Christ a wounded healer?
5. How might feelings of humiliation and loneliness have a long-term effect upon us?
6. What do you think about Christ's cry of dereliction?
7. Is it possible for a Christian to never feel lonely?
8. What does it mean to consider someone "better than yourself"?

APPLICATION

1. What can we do to create the kind of fellowship Paul speaks of at EMC?
2. Who do you need to encourage this week? Make it a point to contact them.