

## THE JOURNEY FROM LONLINESS TO SOLITUDE (Matt. 14: 22-33)

### 1. Loneliness the Universal Human Experience

- Loneliness, most if not all of us try to **avoid** the inner ache of loneliness, yet it is an experience that enters into everyone's life at some stage.
- You might have felt it as a **child** when everyone laughed at you, or when you were the last one to be picked for the sports team
- You might have felt it as a **teenager** when you were homesick in a boarding school, or when you struggled to find a date for the dance.
- You might have felt it at **university**, when everybody talked grades, but friends were hard to find, or when you were the last to find out about social events.
- Even when we go to the **parties** we often come back more acutely aware of our loneliness.
- You might have felt it as an **adult** when nobody paid attention to your suggestions, or just when you were alone with a book that could not keep your attention.
- You may have felt it as an **elderly person** when your children ignore your needs, or when your spouse is taken from this world.
- Practically every human being can recall similar or much more dramatic situations in which they have experienced that unsettling inner ache, that makes us say, 'I feel lonely'
  
- Novelist and writer **Thomas Wolfe** - "The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary people, is the central and inevitable feature of human existence."

## 2. The Human Christ, the Lonely Christ

### 2.1 Setting the Scene

- The gospel passage from last week speaks of the compassion that Jesus had on the crowd that followed him. We are told that he **healed** the sick and then **fed** the five thousand.
- The passage from Matthew, that I read today, speaks of a Christ with **power over the natural world**; he walks on water and calms the storm.
- All this seems to imply a Christ who is **more than a mere man**, a mere human.
- Indeed this is often the Christ that we are most **comfortable** with.
- We want to be most intimately **acquainted** with the victorious risen Christ... however we are often less quick to embrace the human Christ in all his frailty.
- Through the ages the church, in her **creeds**, has always insisted that Christ is both fully human and fully divine.
- I would like to focus on Christ as **human** this morning.

### 2.1 The Lonely Jesus in the Passage

- Like all of us, **Jesus** knew only too well the deep ache of **loneliness**
- At this point in the Gospel narrative, Jesus has just heard of **John the Baptist's** death.
- Jesus had tried to **withdraw**, but the crowds had followed him, we pick up the story with the word immediately.
- Why did Jesus **immediately** dismiss the crowds and send the disciples away?
- Would they try to force Jesus into **political** action... make him a warlike messiah to overthrow the Romans?
- Jesus seems to have been **misunderstood** by both the disciples and the crowds, and now the one person, John, that had some inkling as to who Jesus was is dead
- Matthew makes a point of telling us that Jesus was **alone** when he went to pray on the mountain before walking on the water. But Jesus had felt alone in the midst of all the crowds for a while already

### 2.3 The Spirituality of Jesus

- **Nolan** makes the point that we often speak of a spirituality centered on Christ, rather than asking what kind of spirituality Jesus practiced
- We are told time and again by the gospel writers that Jesus **withdrew** to be alone, to pray to the Father, the one he called his Abba
- In this instance we are told that Jesus only returned to the disciples in the **fourth watch** of the night (3-6am), that is considerable time alone... perhaps he nodded off for a spell?
- We can only guess as to Jesus exact method of prayer, however I believe strongly that Jesus would have included some silent **listening** meditation
- **In this way Jesus, like Elijah before him, would have discovered the voice of God, not in the storm, earthquake or the fire, but in the sound of a low whisper**
- Jesus did not run from his loneliness, rather he **embraced** his loneliness and was able to transform it into a deeply enriching solitude

### 3. Rewards of the Journey from Loneliness to Solitude

- We like Christ must **embrace** our loneliness
- This is not an easy step... much like **Peter's step** from the boat it requires a great deal of courage, but the **rewards** are significant
- Better understanding of our **world**, oneness with **self**, oneness with **God**, and oneness with **others**
  
- I will only focus on the last of these; oneness with others. Indeed this is the great **paradox** of solitude.
- **Thomas Merton** - "it is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection, and filled with reverence for the solitude of others."
  
- It is precisely through quiet meditation that we are able to practice what Mystics through the ages have called **detachment**, and what Merton alludes to above
- Detachment, properly understood is an inner **freedom**, the ability to let go
- **Well summed up in the words of Jesus** "whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt 10:39)
- When we try to save our lives, when we **cling** to our lives, when we are not willing to give up our lives for others, we are already dead.
- **Meister Eckhart** - "detachment is more fundamental than love itself, because without freedom from our attachments we cannot love fully and unconditionally."
- **CS Lewis**, book about love - need love, gift love, appreciation love
- In the context of a **woman** "I cant live without you" "I want to provide for you" "gazes, holds its breath and is silent, rejoices that such a wonder should exist, even if not for me"
  
- The **reality** is that we are too afraid or too busy to embrace our loneliness and allow God to transform it into an enriching solitude
- **Henri Nouwen** - "We are too busy with urgent matters to find time for the essential things of life."