

Not Alone – Love in the Trinity (John 16:32-17:26)

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Alone. Stay at home. In place. Isolation. Distance. Those words go against how God made us for companionship, community, closeness. Those words are opposite of what local churches are to be together, a gathered assembly, a congregation (but we can't congregate or gather). The word *distance* is all over media and social media about how essential "social distance" is for all non-essential things. Some of you watching this were working a job that's not considered essential by our State, and you're battling to remember your identity and worth is in Christ, not what CA says. Others are facing anxiety over their essential needs in the future. Our govt. has deemed livestreaming and video conferencing as essential, but we miss what's essential in person.

Does God's Word have a word on these things? Yes literally cover to cover, from the beginning of the Bible, the source of all this, to plagues at the end. Disease, death, and separation are part of sin's curse on the world, not part of God's original design. God created Adam in a perfect state in a place of perfect fellowship with God, but said "*It is not good for man to be alone.*"¹

Job in the time of Genesis went through a time of distancing in his disease and disaster. Job the most righteous man of his day in suffering lamented his isolation when he said '*they keep their distance ... they keep far from me.*'²

In the books after Genesis, God's Law sometimes called for quarantine for a season, and all Law is to be for good. Lev. 13 told the suspected plagued to isolate 7 days then after inspection by a leader to isolate another 7 days. In that context, it was a visible plague, today an invisible one, but interestingly OT quarantine law came centuries before modern medicine saw its wisdom³

When plagues killed thousands, Moses prayed for mercy.⁴ So should we. So did King David.⁵ David experienced what many infected people feel today. He said in Ps 38 '*my whole body is sick...A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken... My loved ones and friends stay away, fearing my disease. Even my own family stands at a distance...*' How did he pray? '*I confess my sins ... Do not abandon me, O LORD. Do not stand at a distance, my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my savior.*' That's Ps 38 in NLT

It's ok to not like distancing, it's ok to lament isolation--psalms do

Ps 38 in ESV: '*companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off... Do not forsake me, O LORD!...be not far from me!...help me, O Lord, my salvation!*' That's a biblical response in these times, to cry out to the Lord for salvation and to confess our sins that these times help us see.

And for those who are saved, to pray for help from the God who draws near. God said in 2 Chron 7:13-14: '*When I...send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*' We're not Israel, our land doesn't have its promises, but our Lord does give promises to His people who humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and repent, He forgives

Our Lord taught saving grace comes to the humble sinner who '*stood at a distance... beat his breast, and said "God have mercy on me, the sinner."*'⁶ America needs mercy, a mighty superpower being humbled by microscopic sickness. This is crushing idols (control, comfortability, security, money). Our big God can use a little virus to bring us to our knees to see God alone is our shelter. David knew what it was to shelter in place in a cave, alone.

He wrote in psalms these things that are biblical to feel and say '*I am lonely and afflicted...*'⁷ Ps 102 says he felt like he's unseen '*in a far-off wilderness. I lie awake, lonely as a solitary bird on the roof (or 'lonely on a house...').*'⁸ Maybe you feel that way, or like a prisoner in your house. David says in Ps 68 '*God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth prisoners with singing.*'⁹

The psalms of David speak to all the experiences we're going through

His son Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes of '*a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing...*' (we're in that time of refraining and hopefully in the time to heal, the time to love, the time to plant, and the time to build up). Ecc 4 adds '*woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ...how can one keep warm alone?*' That's the challenge before us

Even the great prophet Elijah felt alone, anxious and afraid for his life and he said from his cave to God '*I alone am left.*' He's depressed in 1 King 19. Later in OT history we read of Israel's King Uzziah who contracted leprosy, it says '*until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house...for he was cut off from the house of the LORD.*'¹⁰ That's a sad picture, to be isolated in a house, cut off from the house of God, the temple where Israel worshipped.

Isaiah wrote¹¹ '*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filling the temple.*' That's what we need to see as well, the glory of the Lord exalted and enthroned. In coronavirus crisis we need to remember where Christ is, still on the throne!

Before that holy, holy, holy God we're unclean people living in the midst of unclean people, infected by sin, but God wants to cleanse us and send us. To do that He sent His Son who came across that distance to touch and heal sin. He came to social outcasts, lepers, to those were far off, He brought near by His blood. At the cross it says they stood at a distance, but He died to bring us to a close relationship with God we'll never be apart from. That's the big picture of scripture, I want us to look at the picture right before than in Jn 16

The context is the week of Palm Sunday [that we celebrate today]

Jn 16 is right before Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray alone and then stand trial alone and to die separated, cut off, feeling forsaken of God (Jn 18-19). In the context of this weekend the disciples would be on lock down literally, chapter 20 says they were behind locked doors in fear not wanting to go out. Jn 16 is a home setting, even as many of you are hearing it in home settings. It was to spiritual family in a family room after a family meal Jesus said this

16:32: *Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*³³ *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*"¹ *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,"² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed...²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Today we finish the scene we started 2 weeks ago. This is the upper room where He gave what He called the new commandment to love one another as He loved them (washing their feet, laying down His life for them). Last week Pastor Corey taught on that new commandment, I want to complete that picture of love the way Jesus completed it that night and prayed for it. We need the power of the prayer at the end of this to live out Christ's love.

After Easter we'll start the book of Colossians, all about the supremacy of Christ and His sufficiency and His sovereignty over all and in all things. Today we'll complete this theme of love we began the year with in Heb 10 where it says consider how to stir love and good deeds and encourage each other. As I mentioned in that message on 2020 vision we wanted this year to build relationships among leaders and believers in this church and grow in communication and care and focus on people over programs and the church not as a building but as a body. PTL in how He answers prayer! God moves in mysterious ways wonders to perform. Little did I know how God's vision planned to grow us in all that through this crisis and remind us who Christ is

In this crisis we need to trust who Christ is

The Spirit wants to show us Christ. The Son shows us the Father, and the Father shows us what love in between the 3 looks like so that we'll show the world. We've all heard messages on love, this one will focus on the Trinity.

- Outline:
1. The glory - love in the Trinity
 2. The reality – we're never alone
 3. The responsibility – show the world [REPEAT]

First, the glory – love in the Trinity (1 God in 3 persons blessed Trinity)

To understand the Trinity, don't look to 3-leaf clovers or water in 3 forms, look to Jn 16-17. God isn't like an egg, He doesn't have 3 modes or 3 parts, He is 3 persons in the one true God. God in Isaiah says there is no other, no other god, and He won't glorify another.¹² But in Jn 17:1 Jesus speaks these words as He looks up to heaven, words no one besides God could ever say:

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...

Jn 16:13 He talks about God the Spirit, what does this 3rd person do? 16:14:

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. So Father, Son, and Spirit share what's theirs and the Spirit glorifies the Son, the Father glorifies the Son, both glorify the Father.

17:5 *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed...* " God alone before creation. **1:1:** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father... [v. 8 calls Jesus] the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* That's ESV, the NAS says 'God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has explained him.'

So there's this close intimacy of God in the bosom of or at the side of God the Father. The Word that became flesh is God and was with God as Creator and the Spirit in John 1 dwells on Jesus and remains on Him. Like waters in Gen 1 the Spirit hovered over, Jn 1 says at Christ's baptism waters the Spirit came down like a dove, hovering. The Father said '*this is my beloved Son.*' That's the glory of love in the Trinity. **17:24:** *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

Some call it a covenant of redemption: God's covenant love gift to His Son of a people. In eternity past the Trinity had no lack, no needs unfulfilled, no loneliness. The Father didn't need somebody to love, outside Son and Spirit. The 3-in-1 God was *NOT* incomplete without us. But God chose to create for His glory in love. 1 Jn 4:8 says '*God is love.*' God's very eternal nature is love, that didn't start after creation. From all eternity there's been perfect love within the Trinity. *God is love.* Love in Scripture doesn't seek its own, biblical love is to other persons, so this shows the Trinity: God has always existed in 3 persons in a love relationship. That love God chose to overflow to a people the Father chose, the Son redeemed, and the Spirit regenerates.

Shai Linne: inter-Trinitarian love should make us astonished ...
 Overflow of joy and love, the Father made ... a promise
 To give His Son a people to liberate from their bondage
 So they're no longer slaves and hostages but blameless and spotless
 Consequence of eternal love--our salvation's accomplished! ...
 when we lived as God's opponents, He gave His only Son for atonement
 So we've got to see He can't possibly love us more than He does this moment
 In love, He justified us, in love, He sanctifies us
 So we don't have to jump through hoops to try to make Him like us ...
 [chorus] Love so perfect, love eternally – transcends our understanding ...
 One thing we truly cannot fathom--we're stunned
 The Father loves us with the very love He has for His Son!¹³

v. 23 *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.* He prays all will know God the Father loves believers just as He loves Jesus and our response should be to sing O how wonderful the Father's love to us!

That glory – love in the trinity – takes us to a #2 reality – we're never alone

16:32, this weekend they'd be homebound, v. 32b *'...each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.'*

He said these things, v. 33 so His followers will have peace in Him, even in tribulation or troubled times. We're to take courage, He overcame the world and He prays the world will know God loves us with the love of the Trinity. The Father is always with Christ and us in Him, His love won't leave alone.

16:27 *for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. So every believer who loves Jesus is loved by the Father. Look at 15:9: As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*

The Father loves us as He loves Jesus and Jesus loves us as the Father loves Him. And Jn 14:31 says Jesus did what He did for His Father, *'so the world may know that I love the Father.'* Jesus wants the world to know He loves His Father, and He prays in Jn 17 the world will know the Father loves us as He loves Jesus. He loves those who love Jesus. How do we know if we do? v. 20: *In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him...*

v. 23 explains He won't leave us alone: *If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him...* The Father-Son's infinite intimate love of family. If you're physically at home alone today, but you love the Lord, the Father and Son can meet you spiritually in a special way today and make their home with you. Child of God, you're not alone! You can say with the Son of God *'Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.'* And Jesus promises *'I am with you always, to the end of the age.'* And He helps us be assured of it by His Spirit

14:16 *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,*¹⁷ *even the Spirit of truth...* [Grk 'another of same kind'].

Not another Helper of a different kind, but of the same kind, God very God, the Spirit will be with believers forever. End of v. 17: *...You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*¹⁸ *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you..."* His followers wouldn't be fatherless or orphaned, left alone without love. I remember in Congo saying those words in Swahili as I left for a time, I promised my son 'meta cuya ten' (I will come back to you). It was in those days that he called me 'Papa wangu' (Swahili for my daddy). I came back to the orphanage to be with him and bring him home with me. That's an earthly metaphor that Jesus gives a spiritual meaning to in v. 18.

The disciples would leave Jesus that night, but He wouldn't leave them

How did Jesus not leave them as orphans after He left earth to go to heaven? He came to adopted brothers by His Spirit who's in and with them forever. Rom 8:15 says believers '*have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*' And it goes on to talk about Jesus and His many brothers and how nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Rom 5: '*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*' Paul's application in Rom 15:30 '*I appeal to you, brothers...by the love of the Spirit, to strive together...in your prayers...*' Paul did that alone in prison.

In Mk 1 Jesus '*went out to an isolated place to pray.*'¹⁴ There's value in places of isolation for relations with God in prayer. You're not alone, as He says in Jn 16 '*I am not alone, the Father is with me*'

Older believer, if you're fearful or just frustrated to be isolated, depressed to have to stay home, or discouraged you're not able to come and go anymore, listen to Moses in Dt 31: "*I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go...Be strong and courageous. Do not fear...it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.'*" [Heb 13 quotes that for contentment]

**God's 'presence to cheer and to guide, strength for today, hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine with 10,000 beside, Great is Thy Faithfulness'
Morning by morning new mercies I see, all I have needed Thy hand provided'**

Joni Eareckson sang a song inspired from Jn 16:32 '*Alone Yet Not Alone.*' It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song in the 2013 Oscars but sadly it didn't make it and Joni didn't get to sing it onstage. But it was part of a movie by that same title based on a true story in the 1750s of Christians kidnapped by a savage tribe in the French Indian war. What kept the German captives going was the hymn Allein und doch nicht ganz allein.

I'm alone, yet not alone. God's the light that will guide me home.
With His love and tenderness, Leading through the wilderness,
And wherever I may roam, I'm alone, yet not alone.
I will not be bent in fear. He's the refuge I know is near.
In His strength I find my own. By His faithful mercies shown.
That so mighty is His shield All His love is now revealed.
When my steps are lost. And desperate for a guide,
I can feel his touch, A soothing presence by my side.
Alone, yet not alone. Not forsaken when on my own.
I can lean upon His arm, And be lifted up from harm.
If I stumble, or if I'm thrown, I'm alone, yet not alone.
He has bound me with His love, Watchful angels look from above.
Every evil can be braved, For I know I will be saved.
Never frightened on my own, I'm alone, yet not alone.¹⁵

Reality: we're not alone. 3rdly finally: **our responsibility: show the world**

We need to end in Jn 17 where Jesus ends His prayer. In Jn 17:18 He says of us: *As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.* [v. 23] *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me...²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*"

That love of the Trinity is to be seen in our unity before a watching world. The Spirit is how that love is in us, the fruit of the Spirit, unity of the Spirit.

God the Spirit is equal with God the Father and God the Son but He submits His role to be Helper, Supporter, behind-the-scenes, always points to Jesus, He shows us what the unity of the Spirit needs. Bruce Ware writes:¹⁶

‘Be instructed by the Spirit’s deep and abiding willingness to serve unnoticed, without overt recognition, without singled-out honor... behind-the-scenes position where no one may know and notice the service we have rendered... To work sacrificially, all for the purpose of pointing constantly to another, [all for other person’s] honor... can be extremely hard to accept. But this is the way of the Spirit, and this is the power that is at work in us, to help us serve to the honor of Christ, that he may receive *all* the glory...

Marvel at the harmony and unity... of the 3 divine Persons... Unity is not sameness, and harmony requires differences working together. If we want a wonderful example of this, we need only look at the... differentiation in terms of individual Person and relationship and role. But... there is joyous harmony, peace, and love within the Trinity... Can it happen in churches as congregations recognize that there is a qualified male leadership, designated by God, while all in the congregation are equal members of the body of Christ, working together with various gifts and abilities, all for the unity of the faith? May God help us. And may we be inspired and empowered by the Spirit... What a beautiful example of willingness to accept the behind-the-scenes place for the sake of advancing the common mission, unified purpose

Sam Allberry’s helpful book *Connected: Living in the Light of the Trinity*, has a word for those of us who ‘are shy – those who *do* love the church and want to get to know her better, but who don’t always find it easy getting to know others. It might be your temperament or ... painful past experiences, but either way, putting yourself out there is at best draining and at worst a big fear for you. No doubt the rest of the church needs to raise their game and make more of an effort. But you probably need to pray about this. Ask God that your love for Christ would lead to such a love for his people that your interest in them would eclipse any natural fears or inhibitions.

It can be easy if we’re naturally shy (and I include myself in this) to step back and wait for everyone else to approach us. But not only is it their job to be interested in me; I need to be interested in them. You might be worried that you’re just not an interesting enough person. [He says] I’ll let you into a great observation I heard a few years back: what makes someone interesting *to* others is that they are interested *in* others.’¹⁷

We’re made in God’s image, that involves representing Him and a relational design like God within the Trinity. Even in Eden it wasn’t good to be alone, man was made for community, like perfect God: Father, Son, Spirit in unity. Times like these can bring people together, but there’s also temptations and tests in these times. In our families some of us have found being around just us 24/7 has challenges. I’ve found myself more irritable and irritating to the people around me. You who are alone have your challenges in these times, and houses full of sinners (like mine, like me) see sin multiply, I see mine in my selfishness, shortness, stress, stir-craziness, etc. And just as families will see temptations grow as the pandemic grows, church families need to guard against temptations, frustrations, judging others motivations, impatience, etc

PTL He’s praying for us still. We need to look up with Him in v. 1 higher to His glory and to the world who needs to see His love in such a time as this. PTL it’s His love in us and His Spirit is in us as we abide in His love, Jn 15. So as we end our time here, don’t let this time end without taking time to talk about how you can show Christ’s love to one another and share Christ’s love in the gospel with the world. Pray through and talk through application with each other in your home or on the phone, in your living room or Zoom. Don’t just stream movies, point people to streams of living water in Christ. If death tolls increase, let’s increase efforts to share Christ’s hope and life.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy, To multiplied trials His multiplied peace...
When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done;
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources, Our Father's full giving is only begun.
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His pow'r has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Sermon Discussion and Application Questions

1. Who were some of the believers mentioned in Bible times who experienced isolation or distancing? How should that encourage us?
2. What were some feelings David had in the psalms that people face in this coronavirus crisis? Is it ok to not like or lament all this?
3. How does the context of John 16:32 relate to our situation? How can it encourage us?
4. What truths about God as a Trinity most impact you from John 14:16-31? Why?
5. Is there any value to isolation? (hint: see Mark 1:35). How can you use these times?
6. How does the Holy Spirit in particular show us how to love and serve in relationships?
7. Any further applications or meditations?

¹ Genesis 2:18.

² Job 30:10 NLT and NKJV.

³ Al Mohler notes: ‘we need to recognize something that many people may not have thought about. The category of quarantine, of this kind of isolation is actually found in the five books of Moses. In the book of Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14 ... [the nation’s law] mandated in an effort to try to isolate those who are infected and also to try to protect the children of Israel from this larger threat. This has obvious application to our situation today where the very same logic is in play. The same logic we find in the book of Leviticus is the logic that is now coming from the White House, it’s coming from the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, it’s coming from the World Health Organization. But we do need to note, and at this point Christians should find this a matter of reassurance, that it is believed by many medical authorities that Leviticus 13 and 14 are the very first records in human history of the category of quarantine. Now that raises some other issues. This particular text comes from an era that is centuries and centuries before any understanding of germ theory, infection, bacteria, or even the existence of viruses. This tells us something and it’s not so much about the ingenuity of Israel, what it tells us is that God, who had made covenant to protect the children of Israel as his elected nation, God himself had ordered this quarantine regimen upon Israel for the protection of his covenant people.’

<https://albertmohler.com/2020/03/24/briefing-3-24-20>

⁴ Numbers 16:47-49.

⁵ 2 Samuel 24.

⁶ Luke 18:13.

⁷ Psalm 25:16 ESV.

⁸ Psalm 102:6-7 NLT.

⁹ Psalm 68:6 NIV.

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 26:21 NKJV.

¹¹ Isaiah 6.

¹² Isaiah 43, 45, 48, etc.

¹³ Shai Linne, “Perfect Love,” Attributes of God album.

¹⁴ Mark 1:35 NLT.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWVyVMbSzM4>

¹⁶ Bruce Ware, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles & Relevance*, p. 127-130.

¹⁷ Allberry, p. 131-32.