

Sermon Title: Loneliness and Isolation are not in God's plan

- **Human Need for Community**
 - The Genesis account emphasises that it is not good for humans to be alone, pointing to our inherent need for connection and community.
 - Loneliness, especially during COVID-19 lockdowns, has reminded us of the importance of human interaction.
 - Creation of Eve symbolises not just the creation of woman but the formation of society and community, where people give life to one another.
- **Church's Role in Combating Loneliness**
 - God calls the Church to deliver people from loneliness and isolation, welcoming them into a community of grace, love, and forgiveness.
 - When the Church functions as it should, community thrives, but when it fails, the harm caused can be significant.
- **Jesus' Teaching on Marriage and Community**
 - In Mark 10, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question about divorce by reaffirming the sacredness of marriage as a gift from God.
 - Marriage is meant to reflect God's love and the ideal of intimate community. However, human sin, hard-heartedness, and cruelty can corrupt this ideal.
- **Misuse of God's Name for Sin**
 - Jesus condemns those who justify sinful actions—such as casual cruelty or major wrongdoings like abuse—by spiritualising their own desires.
 - The misuse of religious authority, as seen in high-profile Church scandals, leads to real-world harm and tears communities apart.
- **The Impact of Sin on the Church Community**
 - When the Church glorifies human sin, it ceases to reflect the love of Christ, and communities are deeply damaged.
 - Conversely, when the Church lives up to its calling, lives are transformed, and people experience the love of God through the community.
- **Responding to Modern Loneliness**
 - Loneliness is now recognized as a global health threat, with millions feeling isolated in society.
 - The Church must rise to the challenge of welcoming the marginalized, showing the love and grace it has already received from God, and creating a true community for all.

Questions:

1. Genesis 2:18 speaks of it "not being good for man to be alone." How does this passage shape our understanding of human nature and our need for community? Consider the role of relationships in God's design for humanity.
2. In light of Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:2-16, how does hard-heartedness affect relationships, particularly in the context of marriage and community? Reflect on how sin can distort God's intentions for love and unity.
3. What are some ways the Church can actively combat the epidemic of loneliness in today's world, as highlighted in your sermon? Discuss how the church can be a place of healing and connection for those feeling isolated.
4. How can we prevent our personal weaknesses or sins from harming others within the church community, as seen in the examples of "church going wrong"? Explore how individuals and the church can be accountable for actions that may hurt others.
5. In what ways can the church better embody the love and grace of God, particularly towards those who feel marginalised or have experienced rejection, even by religious communities? Reflect on practical steps the church can take to foster inclusivity and healing.
6. How does the image of marriage as a "microcosm of community" reflect God's larger plan for society and the church? Consider how intimate, loving relationships can serve as a model for the wider Christian community