

The Greatest Gift You Can Give

On Sunday, we continued our new sermon series called “How To Neighbor” by looking at how we can be a better ‘be Jesus’ to those who are lonely.

1. Warm up question: Jeff told how, when he was in high school, he was socially awkward and lonely. How would you describe your personality when you were in high school?
2. Loneliness is an epidemic in our fast-paced, highly mobile, disconnected, just-email-me world today.
 - a. When in your life have you felt most lonely?
 - b. When in your life has someone made an extra effort to include or befriend you? How did that feel? Would you like to offer the same gift to others?
3. On Sunday, we looked to the example of Jesus for guidance as to how we can best love those who are lonely. The first thing we saw was the importance of loving with **touch**. Read Mark 1:39-45.
 - a. Leprosy was a devastating ancient disease. It caused skin lesions and puss-filled lumps, altered your voice, contorted your face, often caused your jaw bones to swell up in lion-like fashion, and eventually caused parts of your flesh to rot. People with leprosy were put out of their village, forced to forage and beg for food, and to shout a warning to any who approached, “Unclean!” Suppose you had been a leper living in the ancient world, what do you think you would have missed most about the life you had before you got the disease?
 - b. Suppose the highly-contagious leprous man in Mark 1 had rushed up to you, got in your space, knelt before you, and asked for prayer. How would you have likely reacted? What are the odds you would have touched him?
 - c. Jesus often healed people by just speaking a word. Why do you think he decided to touch this man?
 - d. Jeff told the story of an elderly woman named Ruth who always went through the same grocery line because the young clerk in that line had the habit of squeezing her hand when he gave her back her change. She eventually told him it was the only time during the week that anyone ever touched her. What can we learn from that story?
 - e. Tell us about a time when a simple touch meant a lot to you – or a time when you were able to offer a simple touch that meant a lot to someone else.

4. A second way we love the lonely is by **listening** – not casual listening, not listening to respond, but deep listening to understand what the other person is experiencing. In the Scripture passage we studied on Easter, we saw an example of Jesus offering the gift of deep listening to his confused, grieving disciples. Read Luke 24:13-24.
- In this story Jesus appears as a stranger to two of his followers three days after his death. As he walks with them, he patiently asks questions, draws them out, and lets them talk. He already knew everything they said, but Jesus didn't interrupt. He didn't say, "Tadum! It's me! Get over your sadness. Snap out of it!" He just listened for the longest time. Why?
 - Jeff shared the story about how Pastor David, in his state job, encountered a small business owner who was furious at the prospect of another environmental inspection of his repair garage. The man fumed and threw things for about 15 minutes before finally wearing himself out. That's when David said to the man, "You've been talking to me like I'm someone else. Who are you talking to?" The man sighed and confessed, "My ex-wife." He then proceeded to tell David all the troubles he was having in his personal life and how that was affecting his business. By the time David left, the man was crying, apologizing, and thanking him. If you had been David, how would you have been tempted to respond when the man was fuming and throwing things?
 - What can we learn from David's experience?
 - Tell us about a time someone listened deeply to you. How did that feel?
 - What's the difference between listening to someone in a way that truly alleviates loneliness versus listen in a way that offers little help? What are the keys to listening deeply?
5. The third way we love the lonely is with **time** – by interrupting our busy schedules to offer the gift of our time. Jesus modeled this for us as well. Read Luke 5:17-26.
- In this story, Jesus was right in the middle of speaking to a full house of rapt listeners, including some very influential Pharisees and religious teachers. It was an important moment that got interrupted by people digging a hole in the roof and lowering the paralyzed man on a stretcher. Yet Jesus stopped what he was doing and compassionately helped the paralyzed man. Think of a time when you were in the middle of doing something important and got interrupted by someone in need. How did you respond?
 - Lonely people can be found anywhere – in our immediate family, our extended family, our circle of friends, a next door neighbor, someone at work, or someone in church. We can be a Jesus miracle for that person. Who is God laying on your heart? Who in your life needs more of your time, or your listening ear, or the gift of touch?