

Outline for Message: ***From isolation to community***

Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-5, 28-31; Matthew 23:37, 24:30-31

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2040:1-5,%2028-31;%20Matthew%2023:37,%2024:30-31>

One point: Jesus is the human moment, God's *invitation* into community. Jesus is God saying "I'll go first."

- I. Me – I'm an introvert and a private person – small talk is easy, community is hard
 - a. "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing..."
 - b. Anyone else not willing?
- II. We – We long for depth and community, and turn away from it.
 - a. We put ourselves into deserts of isolation.
 - b. What are some signs of and contributors to our isolation?
 - i. Garages, long commutes, privacy
 - ii. Phones/email/text
 - c. Community and connectedness feel risky, but in their absence, we fill up with junk
 - i. food, alcohol/ tv/ chat rooms/ pornography
 - ii. social activities like divinity candy – sweet but ultimately unsatisfying
 - d. This time of year is especially hard
 - i. We're supposed to be feeling close
 - ii. We're in a frenzy, or we're lamenting not being in a frenzy
 - e. We are longing for a human moment – a moment of real connection, of real hope
 - f. But our fear of vulnerability makes us retreat into the desert and draw a line in the sand for God
- III. We – Community emerges in the desert
 - a. Maria's story – Re:generation Quarterly, Spring, 1999.
 - b. Teams and military, work groups, ministries – the first few days of tragedy
- IV. God
 - a. Makes us for community – Adam and Eve, disciple groups
 - b. We were made to be family with God and each other. Who are brother and mother? Those who follow me. Jesus calls God "Father" or "abba" and all of us children.
- V. God steps over the line, makes the first move
 - a. By continually accepting us back
 - b. By sending Jesus to be truly vulnerable
 - c. leads by example: break down the isolation, take away the safety of distance
 - d. Jesus is the *human moment*. Whether we are wandering alone in the desert or typing on our computers at 2 in the morning, isolation is the curse of humankind. (Cain was sent into wandering and isolation.)
 - e. God is no longer distant – God wanted a human moment – God sent Jesus.

- f. Jesus is the outstretched hand in the emptiness.
 - g. Jesus is the engraved invitation into community.
- VI. We can take the risk, because God has already taken the first one
- a. True community requires both small talk and deep interaction. You can't have both community and clean fingernails.
 - b. every Sunday someone is grieving and someone is joyful – and the church gathers
 - c. followers of Jesus don't necessarily know how to be church – how to be community – but we all want to know and to practice it
 - d. Hope parties, fellowship time
 - e. Bible study, Jump Start
 - f. Small groups, 2s and 3s
 - g. Prayer chain
 - h. Ministry with others: Convalescent Hospital, Montgomery Street
- VII. Christmas is the moment when God takes the risk for us. Take the risk to break down your walls and really get to know others. Take Jesus' outstretched hand. Accept God's engraved invitation. Come into community. Come into hope.

Maria Said, journalist, excited to spend time working in African desert.

imagined a small hut of her own, with a palm tree, desk surrounded by mosquito netting —The English Patient, or Out of Africa....

No housing had been arranged for her... but a room with walls that reached only to the level of her head

"For two years, I shared my home with more than 30 children, four freedom fighters, a government bureaucrat, a wife-beater, a Red Cross worker with a taste for liquor, a number of prostitutes, a madman, and all the customers of the tea shop next door."

A room with half-walls is a room with a view - of everything. ... Maria quickly discovered that her notions of "community" and "neighbor" were based in a reality of privacy. Here: no time-outs, no private moments.

Painful, but critical to spiritual growth and creating community.

We believe our quality of life would improve if we could spend more time at home.

But we're not lacking time at home; we're longing for community and connectedness.

And it is this tension between the need to be alone and together that God resolves in the Incarnation. God could have been distant and private, but God lowers the walls, and calls on us to do the same. ...

If we experience such a relationship, times of joy and comfort will emerge. In Maria's half-wall world, when the dust storms came and the lights blew out, the woman who became her best friend would place her candles on top of the wall so that the two of them could share the light. On nights when she worked late, Maria passed bowls of American-style food over the wall and listened as the woman and the tea shop customers tried to identify and swallow the strange meals. Each night, after they dragged their rope beds out of the hot rooms into the small courtyards, they would whisper over the wall and wish blessings for the next day. The woman called Maria "sister" and made her a part of her family.

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Listen to the words of the ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah:

“Comfort, O comfort my people” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid ...”

A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.”

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

Now, we turn to the words of Jesus, as recorded by the gospel writer we know as Matthew:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing...

All the tribes of the earth will mourn, and then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.