

A sermon preached at Zion Episcopal Church
Trinity Sunday, June 4, 2023
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Even before the pandemic began in 2020, the US surgeon general Dr. Vivek Murthy identified that our country was in the midst of an epidemic of loneliness. He found that social disconnection was increasingly common—especially among teens, who are 70% less connected than those in their age group from just twenty years ago.

Loneliness isn't a uniquely American problem, it is a feature of modern life around the globe. Participation in community organizations — from faith groups to recreational leagues — has declined in recent decades. Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health and is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. Even if you have a lot of people around you, you can feel lonely, because loneliness is about the quality of your connections.

These days, many people use social media as a replacement for in-person relationships, and this often meant lower-quality connections. The loneliness epidemic was, of course, magnified by three years of the COVID-19 pandemic. To heal from this epidemic, the surgeon general urges us to build more connected lives and a more connected society.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate the connectedness of God. Jesus didn't talk too much about the Triune nature of God, but he described how connected he was to the creator. He said things like, I am in the Father and the Father is in me. And, If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

He also promised his disciples that they would become just as connected because he would send the Holy Spirit to them. The same Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism, would be with each one of us. In today's passage of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am with you always." How can that be? It is because the very nature of God is about loving connections.

Author and theologian C S Lewis said, "All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement, God is love. But they seem not to notice that the words, "God is love" have no meaning unless God contains at least two persons. Love is what one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, God was not love. God, therefore, is a community of love."

God is three and still one -a holy community. This is the same holy communion into which we have been created. In the book of Genesis, we hear that God is a holy communion and that we are created to be the same: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." So, when God said let us make humankind in our image, God was inviting us into that nature of love. To love God and to love one another. That is our true identity and relationship to one another.

Theologian Nancy Rockwell describes how the Trinity's Three-ness creates a space, like the space within a triangle, and this space is large enough to hold all the world. I love this image.

It is the very nature of the Trinity, that makes it possible for God to always be with us. No matter what - whatever circumstances we are in- God will be there. We were born into this connection, created for this connection, and are called to nurture this connection with God and with one another.

So what will we do if we truly believe God in Christ who said, "I am with you always"? What could our lives look like, what could our ways of being look like, if all we did and said was grounded in the fact that God is always with us? If we believe God is here, how should we be with each other? For one thing, can we take some Sabbath time away from our devices and increase our in-person interactions? Can we invite more people into our relationship groups? Can we find new ways to connect with God and other people?

Today begins Zion's summertime Formation Bingo. Many of the activity challenges center on these ways of connecting. It was asked what prizes would be given out for this bingo game. But when we join with one another to be God's instruments of care in the world, everybody wins. Cultivating a culture of connection can help to heal this epidemic of loneliness, and bring God's dream for us and this world more and more into being.

Let us pray:

O God, you created us to be in relationship and call us to live in sacred community.
May we celebrate the strands of God's life and love that bind us together
as one human family. Amen