

Loneliness

I've felt much like Mary Oliver in her poem "Lilies" when she writes, "I think I will always be lonely/in this world, where the cattle/graze like a black and white river-/where the lavishing lilies/melt, without protest, on their tongues-/where the hummingbird, whenever there is a fuss,/ just rises and floats away." Much of me wishes I was capable of rising like the hummingbird whenever there is a fuss and float away to a grander pasture. But most of the time it is me grazing in the pasture unable to float away, watching as the world moves around me, people rising and floating away from me like whimsical hummingbirds.

Eager to be loved, instinctively the cord of isolation seizes my tender need to connect and keeps those needs hidden from everyone other than me. As such, I am acutely aware of my loneliness, disconnected from friends, even family, colleagues. It is easy to feel alone at a social gathering, a family dinner, at work. It is easier still to feel lonely in a big city coming into contact with thousands of people each day. How sad it is some days to ride the New York subway when no one is smiling.

Loneliness has been around since Adam and Eve. When God created Adam he said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18) and so we were made relational. And in an age where technology has brought us to a place where we can be connected anywhere at anytime, one might expect loneliness to evolve into connectedness. But our psyche are vulnerable and complicated making it impossible to solve something so intangible, something that transcends our complete understanding. But it does make us ponder why our psyche allows us to feel as though we are alienated from a populated world.

In an article by Miriam Stark Parent, a professor and clinical psychologist, she writes: "Despite [God's] own presence and relationship with Adam, God knew people also need human relationships. Human beings need both vertical intimacy (relationship with God) and horizontal intimacy (with people) in order to be fulfilled. Without those relationships, they are vulnerable to the complex set of emotions described as "loneliness"." As bold a statement this is, consider the depth of the message. To some degree there are those of us who feel deeply connected to people in our lives and yet still feel an indescribable loneliness as if a gap within our very soul was seeking to connect that last piece of the puzzle.

Perhaps if we could be more like the lavishing lilies that seem to forget themselves as they float alike but unlike the hummingbirds: for the hummingbirds rise while the lilies willingly descend, descending freely on the lip of earth's creatures. Here, in my home, I avoid the lips of those I dearly love. And that is the danger of loneliness: isolation. Unaware of the perpetual subterfuges of the mind we find ourselves suddenly helpless in our loneliness. Imprisoned by it. Beaten then left with a swollen heart wounded by what? We must figure it out. We owe it to ourselves to seek the reasons for it and the solutions. To transform our thinking into what is true and real.

And the truth is: we are not alone. However unimaginable it is to grasp, we are made to need one another and, as fantastic as it may seem, to need God. Pascal wrote, "The heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing of." That is much of life...stepping out into an unknown world without knowing why and meeting someone along the way. We are not alone.