

Unseen Advocate

John 14:15-21 | The Jesus Files: Mysteries of the Resurrection | May 17, 2020 | Pastor Katie Matson-Daley

Advocates

I saw a preview for an episode of Father Brown Mysteries this week. I have to admit this is a mystery show that I've never really watched, but I do watch a lot of PBS so I see lots of previews for Father Brown. I thought the preview for this week's episode was helpful in understanding the scripture for today.

Narrator: Next Time on Father Brown. . .

Police Officer at a murder scene: A blow to the head

Narrator: When his friend is wanted for murder, Sid asks for help

Sid: This is Father Brown. He's going to find the real killer in no time.

Narrator: But as Father Brown investigates

Father Brown: I'm trying to save a man from the gallows.

Narrator: Inspector Mallory thinks he's already got the case solved.

Inspector Mallory: The murder weapon was found on your narrow boat.

Narrator: And they're running out of time

Sid: Well we should tell the police

Father Brown: WE have no evidence

In our scripture that Katie Bystrom read this morning we heard Jesus say, I will ask the Father and he will send you ANOTHER advocate. Often times in mystery stories, the detective is not only collecting objective evidence, but building a case to defend the innocent and convict the guilty. The detective is an advocate to reveal the truth and set the wrongly accused free.

Being Left Alone

Dr. Vivek Murthy served as the Surgeon General and as he looked at public health across the United States, he realized that we not only have problems with heart disease, or diabetes in the US, but we have a loneliness epidemic that has real consequences for public health. Nearly 30% of households in the country are made up of one person. Loneliness has a higher correlation with negative health outcomes than obesity, and nearly the same correlation as being a regular smoker. Even people who live with other people find themselves feeling alone in the world today. People often speak about being alone in a crowd.

Loneliness is an issue that has plagued people for millennia, but contemporary life has made loneliness more normative than it ever has been before. Shared meals, shared experiences, shared community membership organizations have decreased in frequency. Phones, computers and TVs mean even when we are together we often aren't connecting. A globalized economy means that people are living farther away from the community they grew up in.

On top of that we're in a season of social distancing and stay home orders. Dr. Murthy, who recently released a book, authored a book that came out this year titled *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*.

Recognizing that the measures to keep us safe from the virus have exacerbated the loneliness epidemic for many Americans, Dr. Murthy in many interviews has offered these three steps as a way to foster a sense of connection.

1- Spend at least 15 minutes each day connecting with someone outside of your home and work, whether that is by phone, email, letter, or zoom. Invest at least 15 minutes each day in your relationships.

2- Be mindful of the *quality* of the time you are spending with other people. Phones, TV, work and other distractions can keep us from connecting with people, even when we are in the same room.

3- Serve. When we use our time doing good for other people we feel less lonely, even when we are alone. Sewing masks, volunteering to run errands, signing cards for inmates, dropping off shelf stable foods or toiletries for the blessing box. All of those things not only make the world better for others but help us feel less lonely.

Jesus promises to help us find connection, with the Father and the Spirit and himself. We will dwell in God and God will dwell in us.

Abandoned – Defended

Through out the Bible God highlights three categories of people familiar with loneliness that the people of God are particularly called to love, serve and protect. Orphans, children without parents to support them – lonely vulnerable people; Widows, women who have lost their husbands (and means of economic support) – lonely vulnerable people; and immigrants (or the stranger) people who have lost their home country, culture and family support.

Good News

We will not be left as orphans (or widows, or strangers) but we will dwell with a God who has promised to be with us forever.

It is because the people who are lonely are also likely to be economically vulnerable, or face injustice, that Jesus doesn't just say that I won't leave you as orphans, promising connection to the lonely, but promises ANOTHER advocate, see Jesus was the first advocate, but ANOTHER advocate in the form of the Holy Spirit. Someone who like Father Brown in the clip we watched will advocate, argue, and fight for our well-being.