

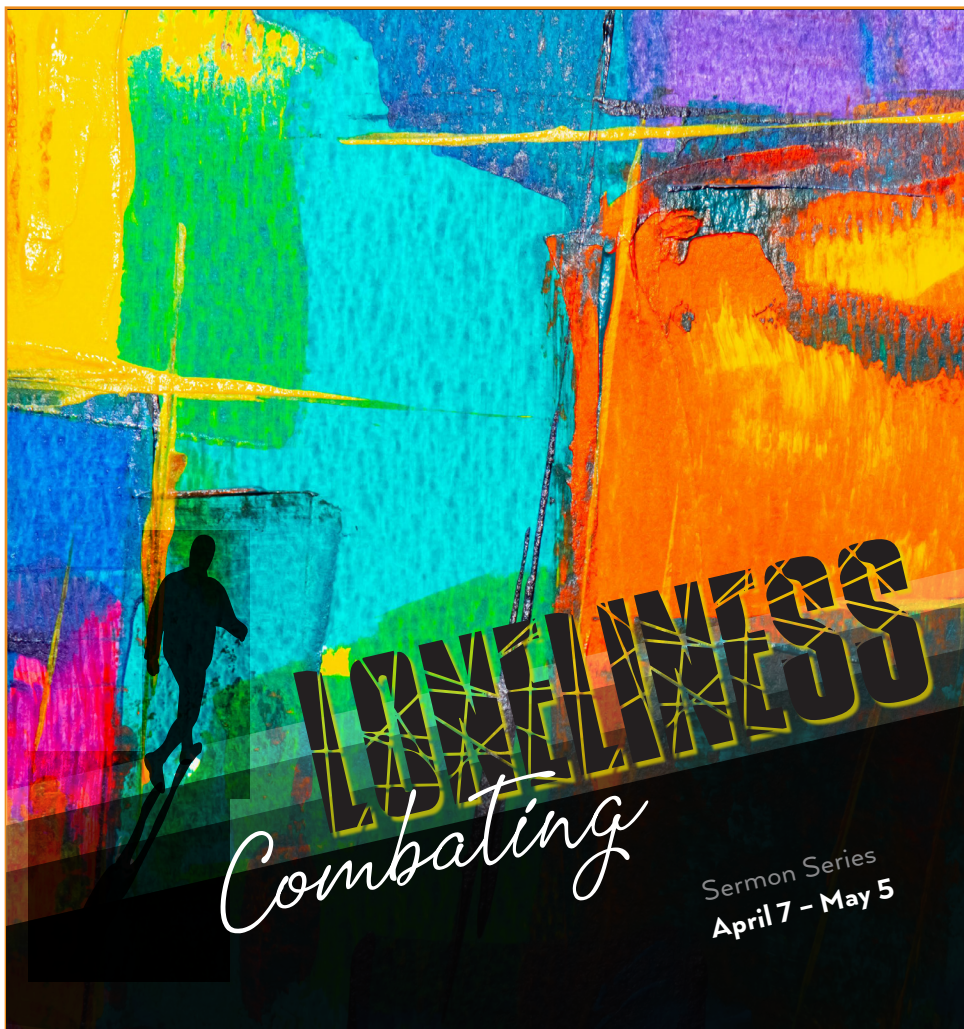
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

DEVO

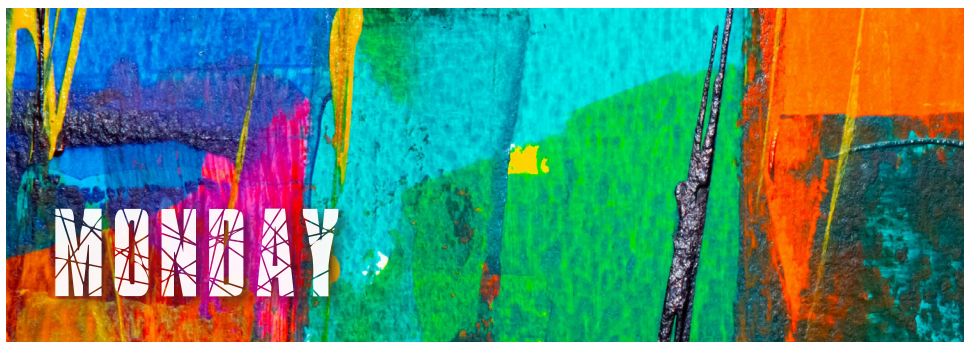
APRIL 8 - 12, 2024



LONELINESS

Combating

Sermon Series
April 7 - May 5



Read **Genesis 1:26-28**

Created for Community

Our God is triune, three in one—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—existing in perfect unity and fellowship. This divine fellowship within the Trinity serves as the ultimate model for community.

When God created humanity, we were created in God's own image, reflecting the communal nature of the Trinity. And God did not make just one human being to represent this divine fellowship, but two. God created humanity in diversity, as male and female, to mirror the communal nature of God's own being.

From the very beginning, God recognized that it was not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Thus, God designed us to thrive in relationships—within marriages, families, friendships, and broader communities like churches. Our interconnectedness with one another is a fundamental aspect of our humanity, echoing the divine communion within the Trinity. Simply put, we were created for community.

However, despite this innate longing for connection, modern society is witnessing a concerning trend of increasing loneliness. (Barna Group) Several studies reveal a stark rise in the number of individuals reporting feelings of isolation and disconnection. The number of

adults who report being lonely has more than doubled over the last twenty-five years, rising from 7% in 1994 to 12% in 2002, and to 20% in 2020, according to the Barna Group's most recent polling. (Susan Mettes)

Our current social landscape often fails to adequately address our deep-seated need for meaningful relationships. Societal norms and technological advancements can actually push us toward isolation. Online shopping, virtual workouts, and social media platforms offer convenience and the appearance of connection, but often lack the depth of genuine human interaction present with in-person activities.

In a world that seems increasingly geared towards the individual, it's crucial to recognize and reaffirm our intrinsic need for community. We must find ways to foster authentic connections with others because denying our need for connection with others denies our basic humanity. As beings created in the image of the Triune God, our very essence resonates with the call to embrace community and build meaningful relationships that reflect the divine fellowship of the Trinity.

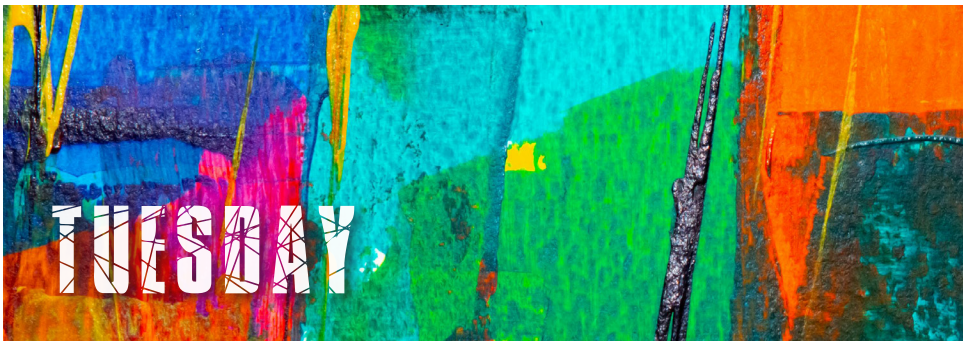
QUESTIONS

How does the concept of the Trinity as a fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit emphasize the importance of community for humans? In what ways do virtual interactions differ from face-to-face connections, and what impact does this have on us?

PRAYER

Glenkirk Women's Retreat, April 12-14

Pray for safe travels to and from Calvin Crest for the women who are attending this retreat.



Read **Genesis 3:6-8**

Separation from God

Genesis 3 describes “the Fall” as a significant turning point in the relationship between humans and God. Prior to the Fall, man and woman enjoyed intimate communion with God, walking with God in the garden and experiencing God’s presence firsthand.

However, they disobeyed God’s command and introduced sin into the world, breaking the perfect harmony that existed between humanity and God. Sin created a barrier that prevented humanity from experiencing the fullness of God’s presence and love, and it imprisoned humanity to the new realities of sin and death.

These consequences of sin affected not only the first man and woman but all of humanity. As their descendants, we inherit a world marred by sin, death, and decay; and we too are bound to them.

Despite this separation, God’s love and mercy remained steadfast. In God’s infinite grace, a plan of redemption was initiated to reconcile humanity back to God. This plan culminated in God sending His own Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Through the Incarnation, Jesus, the Son of God, took on human form, entering into the brokenness of humanity and experiencing life as we do. In doing so, Jesus bridged the gap between God and humans.

Jesus' death on the cross atoned for our sins, rescued us from sin and death, showed us what true love is, modeled for us how to love others, and reconciled us to God. Although "the Fall" in Genesis 3 created a separation between humans and God, God provided a way through Jesus for renewed fellowship where believers can experience communion with God once again.

QUESTIONS

In what ways do you feel separated from God? How can you bring this to Jesus, either for the first time or once again, knowing that God wants a reconciled relationship with you?

PRAYER

Glenkirk Women's Retreat, April 12-14

Pray that this is a time of rest and relaxation for the women who attend the retreat.



Read **Ephesians 2:11-22**

Isolation from Others

“The Fall” created a separation between humans and God, but it also isolated humans from one another. Prior to their disobedience, man and woman existed in perfect harmony with each other, living in a state of mutual love, trust, and companionship. However, as sin entered the world, this harmony was shattered, giving rise to discord, distrust, and ultimately isolation from one another.

One profound consequence of “the Fall” was the emergence of shame and blame. After eating the forbidden fruit, the man and the woman felt ashamed of their nakedness and sought to hide from God (Genesis 3:7-8). This sense of shame extended to their relationship with each other, as they began to blame one another for their wrongdoing (vv. 12-13). The breakdown of trust and honesty between them exemplifies how sin not only isolates individuals from God but also fosters division and estrangement within human relationships.

Another consequence of “the Fall” was the introduction of selfishness and self-interest into the human experience. Where man and woman had once shared oneness of purpose and calling (Genesis 1:28-30), because of sin, hierarchy and division now plagued their relationship (Genesis 3:16). This hierarchy and

division further exacerbated the isolation between humans, as individuals prioritized their own interests over the well-being of others (2 Corinthians 5:15), leading to conflicts, rivalries, and broken relationships.

Thankfully, God launched a rescue mission. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God provided a means for humanity to be reconciled not only with God but also with one another. In the words of theologian Gilbert Bilezikian, “The cross ... not only provides for our reconciliation to God in its vertical dimension, but it also makes possible reconciliation among humans with its horizontal embrace.” Jesus’ sacrifice enables us to once again be reconciled with one another.

By embracing the selfless love demonstrated on the cross, we are empowered to transcend the barriers of sin and selfishness, fostering genuine relationships characterized by love, forgiveness, equality, and mutual respect (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:1-8). The cross serves as the ultimate symbol of reconciliation, offering a pathway for humans to overcome their differences and embrace the greatest commandments of love for God and others.

QUESTIONS

How does an awareness of our own tendencies towards selfishness and division impact the way we approach relationships with others? How can we actively embody the principles of love and humility in our interactions with others?

PRAYER

Glenkirk Women’s Retreat, April 12-14

Pray that the women would be able to close their minds to distractions and really experience God’s presence as they talk about the “Slow Work of God.”



Read **Romans 8:18-25**

Isolation from Creation

According to the creation narrative, “the Fall” in Genesis 3 not only marred the relationship between humanity and God, and our relationships with one another, but it also isolated humanity from the rest of creation.

Initially, humans were appointed as stewards of the earth, entrusted with the responsibility to cultivate and care for it in harmony with God’s design (Genesis 1:28-30). However, the disobedience of the man and the woman led to a profound disruption in this stewardship role, resulting in a fractured relationship between humanity and the natural world (Genesis 3:17-19). Hardship came into the picture as humans toiled the ground for sustenance, finding themselves in conflict with the very environment they were meant to steward and protect.

“The Fall” resulted in the perversion of humanity’s dominion over creation, as selfishness and greed replaced stewardship and care. Instead of nurturing and preserving the earth, humans began exploiting its resources for personal gain. As the ECO Presbyterian Essential Tenets explain, “Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness.”

Despite this brokenness, God promised throughout the Old Testament that all of creation would one day be restored when all things are made new (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). Scripture speaks of creation “*groaning*” or longing for the day of restoration (Romans 8:18-22). God’s desire is for creation to be restored, and that is the picture we see in Revelation 21-22. In the words of Theologian NT Wright: “The ultimate destiny of this created world is not to be thrown away, abandoned as secondary or shabby. ... Easter speaks of a world reborn.”

The redemptive work of Jesus offers hope for the restoration and reconciliation of creation, but also hope for the restoration of relationship between humans and creation. Where “the Fall” brought toil into our lives, Jesus breathes new life into us as we are called to work for Him and not for people (Colossians 3:23), and called to take upon ourselves His light burden (Matthew 11:29-30).

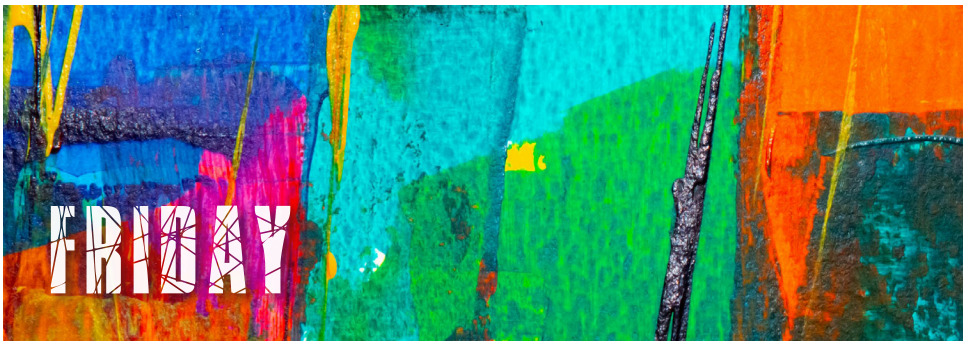
QUESTIONS

Reflecting on the consequences of “the Fall” in Genesis 3 for humanity’s relationship with creation, how does an awareness of your stewardship responsibility influence your own attitudes and actions towards creation? In what ways do you live out this call to *steward* creation?

PRAYER

Glenkirk Women’s Retreat, April 12-14

Pray that the women would be able to connect with one another and build lasting friendships.



Read **Romans 7:4-25; Galatians 5:13-26**

Isolation within Ourselves

Genesis 3 tells us that “the Fall” not only ruptured humanity’s relationship with God, one another, and creation, but that it also caused us profound isolation within ourselves. Prior to disobeying God’s command, the man and woman lived in a state of innocence and harmony, fully integrated and self-aware. However, their act of disobedience introduced sin into the world, causing a fundamental disconnection within themselves and breeding shame, guilt, and distorted desires.

After disobeying God, the man and woman experienced a profound sense of shame and inadequacy, leading them to hide from God and each other (Genesis 3:7-8). Shame brings with it a distorted view of our flaws, weaknesses, and limitations. The resulting self-doubt and insecurity can create a barrier that hinders us from experiencing true authenticity and wholeness within ourselves.

Moreover, “the Fall” also introduced a distortion of desires and priorities. Humanity’s decision to prioritize their own desires over obedience to God’s command led to a rupture in their relationship with themselves as their innermost desires became entangled with selfishness, pride, and rebellion. The Apostle Paul has much to say about this internal conflict between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit that we feel within ourselves (Romans 7;

Galatians 5), and the ways it further exacerbates our sense of isolation and fragmentation.

Finally, “the Fall” corrupted humanity’s perception of identity and purpose, as they became clouded by the effects of sin and brokenness (Ephesians 4:17-18). Instead of embracing our inherent dignity and worth as beings created in the image of God, we began to define ourselves by external standards, such as achievement, status, and possessions, leading to a profound sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).

However, through the redemptive work of Jesus, humans are offered the opportunity to experience true healing and restoration within themselves. We have freedom in Jesus to put off our old selves and be made new, righteous, and holy (Ephesians 4:22-24). Through the power of Jesus, the Spirit of God cultivates in us love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7-10), and we are empowered to confront and overcome the effects of sin, shame, and self-doubt, embracing our true identity as beloved children of God.

QUESTIONS

How does an awareness of your inherent dignity as created in the image of God impact your self-perception and identity? How can a deeper understanding of Christ’s redemptive work help us overcome feelings of shame, self-doubt, and fragmentation within ourselves?

PRAYER

Glenkirk Women’s Retreat, April 12-14

Pray that all the women who attend would hear God’s voice speaking love and grace to their hearts. Pray for this retreat to have a lasting and deep impact on the attendees.



Sources

- Information from the Barna Group can be found at <https://www.barna.com/research/mettes-lonely-americans/>
- Susan Mettes, *The Loneliness Epidemic: Why So Many of Us Feel Alone—and How Leaders Can Respond* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 202).
- Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997).
- *ECO Constitution: Essential Tenets, Polity, and Rules of Discipline*, Revised 2022, Section III-A, p. 4: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58d5cdabe58c627d57e31c71/t/63d2e06b52242f-2b581a2903/1674764405936/%28Official%29+ECO+CONSTITUTION+2022-1.pdf>.
- N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994).

These devotionals are written by a team of Glenkirk volunteers who represent a range of beliefs within the evangelical spectrum. As such, some of the expressed views may not necessarily represent those of pastoral leadership. If you find yourself challenged by a devo, explore why that might be and, should you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Pastor Kate Wallace Nunneley at KNunneley@GlenkirkChurch.org. If you are interested in joining those who pen Glenkirk devotionals, please contact Pastor Kate.

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