

SOLITUDE & SOLIDARITY

By Aimee Joseph

There is much talk of solidarity these days. Our current cultural moment has invited us into showing solidarity with those who are susceptible to a terrible disease even if we ourselves might be not similarly effected by it. We have also been invited into showing solidarity with the people of color in our lives who have personally and collectively experienced racism whether in micro or macro aggressions.

As such, it seems to be a good time to explore the intimate and reciprocal relationship between solidarity and solitude.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wisely wrote, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community" and "Let him who is not in community beware of being alone." At first this paradoxical pair might make us scratch our heads in confusion; after all, many of us do not immediately pair solitude with solidarity.

True community and solidarity with others thrive only when we allow healthy spaces for solitude, which is something different than mere isolation or aloneness. While Covid-19 has necessarily isolated us from one another, it has not insured that we have experienced true solitude. Just as it is possible and often probable to experience loneliness in a crowd, it is also possible to experience aloneness without experiencing true solitude. Solitude is a state of being alone without loneliness. It is a necessity for those who are to walk in intimacy with God and it always leads us back in more wholeness to community. In *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibron writes about the tension between space and togetherness with those we love.

"Let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens dance between you....Give your hearts but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."

For the believer in Christ, every relationship is mediated by the presence of Christ. He is the glue that holds Christian community together. As such, community is strengthened when believers spend time away from each other and alone with Him. Just as a Tesla can only run so far without being recharged, a community of believers can only run when its individual members are vitally and intimately connected to and charged by Christ. In a day



and age when we are being asked to constantly show solidarity with varied groups, we must be fueled by our solitude spent with our Savior. Adrenaline will eventually run out, and the excitement of protests and movements will wane. The only way to sustain a gospel-motivated solidarity with others is to guard our time with Christ.

Christ himself knew the delicate dance between solitude and solidarity. Through he was the God-man, he carved out time to breath in the unpolluted, unhurried air of time with His beloved heavenly Father.

And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed (Mark 1:35).

His public miracles done in solidarity with the weak, the sick, and the powerless came from the quiet places of strengthening He experienced alone with His Father. Before His greatest moment of solidarity with sinful humanity on the Cross, Jesus asked his closest friends to spend time with him in solitude and prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

If the public ministry of word and deed of Jesus Christ had to come through habits of Godward solitude, then how much more will our acts of solidarity with others have to come from places of quiet strengthening with God? May we be a community of believers whose love and solidarity with others are fueled by the sustaining power of our God given through solitude. May this paradoxical pair point others to God!