

“Loss Soul”

Sermon, by Pastor Joy Smith, April 5, 2020

Psalm 27:1, 4–9

Eugene Robinson, Pulitzer Prize columnist, Washington Post recently wrote an article titled: “We’re all in this together, alone.” He writes: “In a crisis, our natural reaction is to do something, anything. What makes COVID-19 crisis so difficult and so unsettling, is that we’re asked to do nothing. The solution scientists tell us, is no action: stay home. Don’t visit neighbors or embrace your friends if you pass them on the sidewalk, or even shake hands. Interact with your co-workers via Slack or Skype or some other software that can only simulate something we seem to yearn to be apart at the most fundamental level: Community engaged in the common purpose. (*Eugene Robinson, Washington Post March 19, 2020*)

So here we are isolated from each other – it is easy to lost the sense that we belong somewhere. Like: groups like book clubs, the gym, church, family reunions, coffee shops, even weddings and funerals have been cancelled until further notice. Places of belonging give us identity. They define us. They help us know who we are and our purpose – and to engage in common purpose. (*Robinson suggests*)

Working for the “Common good” - is a challenge especially when we are worried about our own health and safety.

We are all in this together. As Robinson says: we are in this together – alone.

I read recently, the brain processes information better with other people in real life. Even 6 feet away is better - than alone. Phone and screen talking is better than being alone. But nearly all of us prefer a live person than a remote person. Touch quiets the brain’s emotional activity, but connecting via video conference requires an extra circuit of the brain to get the same effect. “Videoconferencing can help,” “but it requires more work from the brain than physical presence would.” (*The New Yorker, March 23, 2020.*) I experienced that the other night in a church meeting.

Isolation and fear, can result in “Soul Loss” that is losing touch with your Soul. You can’t totally lose your Soul, it is always in the background of your life, but during crisis it is too easy to separate from your true self.

Let me explain. The term Soul Loss does not mean literally losing your Soul. But it’s about losing access to the vital core of you.

Parker Palmer explains: At the soul level, there is a hidden wholeness. In the deepest way, we are whole, and that’s the place where we belong to God and we know we belong to God. We remember that we were created in God’s image, and we seek to represent that which God has given us—to offer our gifts. There’s this hidden wholeness at the deep soul level of our existence.”

I worry that the coronavirus has the potential not only to separate us from each but separated from ourselves. That is Soul Loss.

What is the soul? The soul is generous: it takes in the needs of the world. The soul is wise: it suffers without shutting down. The soul is hopeful: it engages the world in ways that keep opening our hearts. The soul is creative: it finds a path between realities that might defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes. We have to keep trying especially in “shut down” to bring down the wall that separates us from our own souls and deprives the world of the soul’s regenerative powers. (*A Hidden Wholeness*)

Symptoms of Soul Loss: weakness, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and emptiness. We just know that something is missing from our lives – but many of us struggle to discover what exactly is missing.

It makes sense “We are all in this together – but alone”.

The good news: We belong to God. Getting in touch with our soul is remembering that God created us and God loves us, protects us – we come closer to God.

And when you feel lost and afraid and uncertain, or when you feel angry and overwhelmed and tempted to hate, turn to the light of Christ. Find your soul again. Open your heart to healing love. Lean on that power that is greater than you, that created you, that placed your soul at the core of your being.

There may be one positive by-product of the pandemic. “I believe it’s a blessing that humanity in the Western world got this disease,” Ami Rokach, a clinical psychologist at York University in Canada. For the past century, human life has focused increasingly on money and material belongings, which, especially with technology, led to neglect of human relationships. Now that we’re suddenly stuck at home, the best means of surviving, psychologically and biologically, is to interact with people by whatever means available, she said. Even as I observed quarantine, I’ve heard from friends I haven’t seen in decades—and, in one case, forty-five years. “Loneliness is an experience we don’t choose. It’s always painful,” Rokach said. “When we finish a period of isolation and come out of this, I don’t think society will change.

We are slow learners as a species. But we will come out of it and say, ‘Wow, I did all kinds of good stuff.’ Being together may strengthen our interpersonal bonds by illustrating that human connection can help protect our health and save our sanity.”

Being alone/shut inside can provide time to connect with our souls. The core of who you are.

Perhaps we will start to work together for the common good. And reconnect with our souls and just maybe our country will too.

May it be so with us. Amen.

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