

GENESIS 2:18-25
MADE FOR RELATIONSHIPS

People – we can't live with them at times; we can't live without them! John Donne's famous assertion: "No man is an island, entire of itself", tells us that we are part of something bigger, made for relationships with other people. Yet, we live in what someone has called the 'Me-generation' with its sense of isolation and alienation, where more and more people live on their own, who see very few people, we even work in isolation from other people and simply feel alone. Marlene Dietrich's famous quote: "I want to be alone" also rings true and some people take their energy from being on their own for a time; hermits have made a life out of being alone, but they are very much exception. We are made for relationships; there is part of us that knows we can't live in isolation from other people, that knows we need the company of others, that knows we need friendship, companionship and love.

Here's a conundrum: "Do you marry someone because you love them, or do you love someone because you are married to them?" The ideal answer is both. All of our relationships are expressions of love, of being part of something bigger, of caring and being concerned for others, which is what we are made for. Our relationships teach us what love is and help us to learn to love other people better. Marriage is one expression of that, but there are others: family life, friendships, Clubs and associations, neighbourliness, Church. 'Together' is such an important word for us, as human beings and as Christians; we are made to live in relationship with other people, yet so often we spoil these relationships by our 'me-centredness': selfishness, carelessness, thoughtlessness; even Church at times can be more about 'me and my needs' than it is about togetherness and concern for someone else.

Genesis2 tells us "It is not good to be alone!" We have seen so far that God is the Creator of everything and Genesis1 is a hymn of praise to God the Creator. Human beings are made bearing the image of God, to love and be loved, to make moral choices, to love God. Last week, we saw Eden, the garden of delight, in which God placed Adam; Adam the living being into whom God had breathed life was given work to do as the estate manager in Eden, and he was free to work the garden and use its resources as he wished, but responsible to care for the garden that belonged to God. There were boundaries placed on Adam: he was not to eat from the tree in the centre of the garden, the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; God set these boundaries and it was good for Adam to live within these boundaries.

"The Lord..." (2:18) We are made for relationships. We'll see in a moment what kinds of relationships this might include, but as a starting point, this is important. As people, we are made for relationships with one another; as human beings, this is part of our make-up. Marlene Dietrich might have wanted to be alone, but we are not made to live in isolation from one another; we are made for relationships and fellowship with other people. Yet, much of our society is increasingly isolated; by 2012, 50% of people in the UK will live alone; some families are "defined by their sharing the same roof and same TV set while each pursues his or her own detached and separate life" (Atkinson) and now not even the same TV set! Families whose meals are separately micro-waved, eaten in their own room in front of their own TV set – this is much more the pattern of family life in the UK in 2010! It is still not good for us to be alone, but is this the pattern of life? We risk losing something of our humanity when we lose a sense of community and relationships. The Church will either feed that by fostering a 'me-first' mentality in our thinking about faith, or will counter it by rediscovering the 'together' word! We are made for relationships.

When I was preparing this service and looking for another reading to go alongside Genesis 2, I was struck by just how many pictures and activities there are in the New Testament of people in groups, being together. Jesus' disciples lived and worked together; discipleship was a group activity. Leadership in the Church was a group activity, as people sought to serve God together; Paul depended so much on his friends, his fellow-workers, and described them as 'partners in the gospel'. Of course, faith is a very personal thing and so much of what we are depends on our personal relationship with God, but, as people, we are made to be together with others: we worship together, we pray together, we mourn together, we learn together. The very least that the Church needs to be is "community of friendship"; we are made to be together; we are not made to be isolated and alone.

1 Corinthians 13 is all about relationships; these are words that I often read at wedding services because here are powerful words about the quality of our relationships with other people wherever we find them. 'Love' is the quality of good relationships, hence my conundrum earlier: people get married because they have fallen in love with someone and it's very romantic; but that relationship grows and develops new qualities, deeper, more mature qualities. Churches need to have these qualities; friendships need to have these qualities; wherever we go, we need to take notice of other people rather than simply be caught up in our own little bubble. Paul tells us why love is so important: "*If I...*" (v1) and then he gives us 15 qualities of love: "*love is...*" (vv4ff) It is a huge challenge for us to be like this with everyone we meet! Is it impossible? Perhaps; almost certainly! But nonetheless, this is the challenge to which we have to aspire as human beings, as Christians.

Relationships come in all shapes and sizes: in a moment we will talk about marriage, but marriage is not the only kind of good relationship we can have. We live in what someone has called the *Friends-generation*. This is based on the TV programme about a group of friends who share an apartment and it followed their relationships as friends; sometimes their relationships went deeper than that and sometimes they fell apart, but so many people now see that as the model for life; they see no need for anything deeper, no commitments, but just spending time with friends. Church should be the place where that happens more than most: as part of Church, you can find a friend who is just like you, with the same interests, the same gender, the same age, the same work; but you can also find a friend who is different; you can talk to someone of the opposite gender over coffee quite freely and safely; you can make friends with someone older, or younger, who is totally different from you. At one level, Church is just like any other community of friendship and we can find these friendships in other ways and other groups; but Church also takes this to another level of community because "our community with one another consists solely on what Christ has done to both of us" (Bonhoeffer) Not only do we share a common humanity, but we also share something deeper in our Christian faith.

Sexuality is part of this whole relationships question. Here I tread warily for a number of reasons: talking about sex in Church is a difficult thing to do at the best of times; also this is a controversial issue with a Kirk Session meeting on Thursday to talk about material produced by the Special Commission on same-sex relationships, addressing our attitudes to homosexuality. We don't always get these relationships right and it is painful when they go awry and fall apart and churches have not been very good at accepting people whose relationships are different, either because they are single, or divorced, or struggling. However, I can't preach Genesis 2 and ignore the whole question of sexuality and marriage; it is woven into the whole piece; the relationship between Adam and Eve is a significant part of picture of our human relationships.

"It is..." (v18) As if to find a helper suitable for Adam, then all of the animals are brought to him to give them their names, but there was nothing suitable as a partner for Adam there. Instead we have the story of Adam's rib: *"So the ..."* (v20f) They were made for each other; they are people who are equal, different, and complementary. **Equal:** *"bone of..."* speaks of the closest of all relationships, people made from the same stuff! Eve was "not made out of his head to control him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him." (Matthew Henry). **Different:** *Ish* and *ishshah*, the same Hebrew word, male and female counterparts; men and women are physically different, emotionally different, read maps in a different way, have different expectations of relationships. **Complementary:** *"two become..."* like two parts of the one person, they belong together, bringing the differences to work together, complementing one another for the good of both!

"For this..." (v24) Marriage is place for expressing our sexuality according to the Bible. The family unit is created when a man and a woman, husband and wife, are united together and commit themselves to one another. This is always the relationship in which the Bible sees the sexual expression of human love; it has hard words to say to people who take sex outside that marriage relationship in all sorts of ways: adultery, rape, homosexuality; it does recognise that these relationships go wrong and so there is provision for divorce, but in the little that Jesus did say about marriage, He brings us back to Genesis2 as the principle by which to live our lives. We have this wonderful picture of perfection at the end: *"the man..." (v25)* There is no guilt, no shame, no lust, just two people expressing their humanness perfectly in a delightful way and enjoying one another perfectly.

We are made for relationships. It is part of our human-ness! We are social beings, made to be part of a community, made to relate to other people. Marriage, family, friendships, colleagues at work, neighbours, Church – all of these are ways in which these relationships take place and they are for our good. We live in a world where these relationships can go sadly awry, a world where many are isolated and have a sense of alienation. The Church has two things to offer the world, as we see our world from God's perspective: first of all, to be a community of friendship, with all the beauty and value that friendships have to offer; and secondly to show the world what quality relationships look like, with love patience, kindness, loyalty, forgiveness and all the other values and qualities of good, strong, lasting, positive relationships with other people. The world needs to know this; the world we live in needs to rediscover this sense of community and being together; let the Church show the way!