



Series: All In The Family

Title: No One Sits Alone

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Smythe Street Cathedral

Pre-Sermon – Verner Does Offering

The Challenges of Singleness...

In the 2006 Canadian Census, there was a shift recorded for the first time in recorded Canadian census history (which began in 1871). For the first time in our nation, and continuing to this day, unmarried adults outnumbered married adults.¹ Now while that 51.5% of adults includes couples in common-law relationships, the fact of the matter is the number of unmarried people, and single people have been on the increase in our part of the world for a while.

And while the culture around us shifts, sometimes you wouldn't know it when looking at what happens inside of the church. Did you ever notice that in most churches, it is not uncommon to hear messages and studies and resources aimed at married people, but, with the exception of student ministry, relatively few messages, studies and resources appear for unmarried / single people?

The odd thing about that is that everyone is single for a good while at the start of our lives, and that even for those of us who are presently married, it is likely that half of us will be single again, unless we die simultaneously with our spouse (not to say anything of divorce).

Daunting Amount of Diversity

Perhaps it is because when we are talking about singles, we are not talking about a homogenous group of people we are talking about

- Never married celibates
- Single parents
- Divorced (some with kids / some without kids)
- Widowers / widows

And if we are honest, married people, something shifts in your mind when you get married. At least it did for me.

¹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/married-people-outnumbered-for-first-time-census-1.647751>

STORY: TELLING HEIDI THAT BEING UNMARRIED FELT FOREIGN. “THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WE WERE NOT MARRIED?” (A SIMILAR SHIFT HAPPENS WHEN YOU BECOME A PARENT.)

It isn't that you can't remember, but the experience becomes foreign.

Meanwhile the Single Can Feel Like the Kid Alone in the Cafeteria

Have you ever been in a crowd, or at a party, and there is a conversation happening all around you, but you're not in it.

I had a meeting with a singles fellowship we have as a part of the church, to hear their thoughts. While the church intends to be welcoming, sometimes singles feel like the outsiders in the conversation.

And this isn't because those who are single don't want the church to see marriages strengthened.

- Those who are unmarried want to see marriages succeed.
- Divorced people I know really want to see other marriages succeed.
- And widows and widowers want those who still have their spouse to enjoy a good marriage, because they know the value of marriage too.

But honestly church culture can often leave singles feeling out of place.

STORY OF A PASTORAL FRIEND: A FRIEND OF MINE FROM SEMINARY STRUGGLED TO FIND A PASTORATE, AND ALTHOUGH SKILLED AND LOVING JESUS HAD A CHURCH (AND SOME GROUPS) TELL HIM THAT A SINGLE MAN SHOULD NOT BE A PASTOR, ONLY MARRIED MEN. (GOOD NEWS HE IS PASTORING NOW AND HIS CHURCH IS DOING WELL).

So Today we are going to tackle singleness and ask how the Bible can give us insight into how God thinks of singleness. And even if you are not single today, I really believe there is something of value in this message for everyone today, and you never know.

Singles Are Valued and Esteemed by God

In first century Jewish culture, the assumption was that people were to get married.

God doesn't view single people as 'incomplete couples.' Jesus was single when on earth, and if that isn't enough, he affirmed that singleness was a noble way of living in Matthew 19.

Paul also writes of unmarried singles:

1 Corinthians 7:32–34 (NIV84)

32 I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.

There is a freedom that celibate, unmarried singles can have in their devotion. Widows in the early church were recognized and encouraged in their focus on trusting God in Prayer.

1 Timothy 5:5 (LEB)

5 But the widow *who is one* truly, and is left alone, has put her hope in God and continues in her petitions and prayers night and day.

While singleness definitely can sometimes present its own set of challenges, being single can present opportunities of focus, and flexibility in time to be a servant to God's kingdom in a way that is more complicated if you are married.

Throughout scripture we can find singles who are examples of faith and that God shows value to.

- Celibate unmarried: Jesus, Paul
- Widows
 - we can think of the widow that fed Elijah some of the last morsel of food she had for her and her son in 1 Kings 17, and she experienced a miracle of provision for the three of them.
 - Prophetess Anna (who was married for 7 years and was a widow prophet afterward) in the gospel of Luke 2.

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- Divorced – John 4
 - She had 5 husbands (possible she was widowed 5 times, but given she was staying with someone who was not her husband, unlikely)
 - Jesus broke barriers to talk to her
 - She was the first person Jesus directly told he was the Messiah
 - She became an evangelist that led an entire village out to meet and know Jesus

SINGLES: YOU ARE VALUABLE TO GOD JUST AS YOU ARE.

Singles and Loneliness

While some singles may experience flexibility in their time (I would say single parents would be a big exception to this), there is another reality that singles can run up against, and that is loneliness.

As I was preparing for this sermon, my mind was drawn back to the passage in Genesis

Genesis 2:18 (NIV84)

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

While this is a precursor to talking about the creation of man and woman, and the institution of marriage, there is a clear principle that 'it is not good to be alone.'

We find this echoed in other places in scripture, perhaps most famously in:

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (NIV84)

9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:
10 If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!
11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?
12 Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Talking to the singles group, I wrote this down:

“PEOPLE WANT TO BE KNOWN, TO BE INTIMATE AND HONEST.”

How do we as a church support this? The early church did:

Acts 2:42–47 (NIV84)
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

As you know I work with Circles, developing community within our church. I became passionate about this from something that happened back in my single days.

ALLELOUS

- Where I lived
- Own place
- Common house, meals
- Married, singles, children, divorced, older, younger.
- Became family (brothers and sisters)

BEING SINGLE SHOULD NOT MEAN BEING ALONE.

This means having courage:

- For the single – to reach out (e.g. singles group)

- For the married to have the courage to get past discomfort
 - Difference in stage in life
 - Mourning divorce
 - Awkwardness of the widow / widower.

Singles group, Olesons.

What could we become if we saw our singles

Untapped life, love, friendship. Jesus loves everyone, Jesus love singles. How much richer might our families be, our suppers be, our friendships be if we embraced the single people in our midst. In so doing we are doing the will of God.

Psalm 68:6a (NIV84)

God sets the lonely in families...

Closing

The past few weeks we have taken time to acknowledge the different groups we have talked about: Mothers, seniors, parents.

Today if you are single, I'd ask you to stand where you are. I don't want you to come down to the front though.

We see you, we value you.

I want you to know that we don't want you to be alone. I'm going to ask everyone to stand around you, and if you are married, I would prefer if there is someone handy you don't know that you to introduce yourself ask their name, maybe how long they have been here, or if they have something they would like prayer about.

I will give you a moment, and then start praying and I'll pray to close the service.