

## “Rooted and Grounded in Love”

Ephesians 3:14-21

Genesis 2:15-23

At the beginning of the pandemic, a woman named Kelly Victoria was having a hard time with the lockdown. She was walking down her street and noticed something that hadn't been there before. There were some tiny objects arranged very intentionally in a planter with a note attached. A little girl who was four years old felt very lonely and she wanted to do something to make other people happy. So, she set up a fairy garden with tiny, brightly colored objects to attract tiny sprites and other magical creatures. She invited anyone to add what they had, too.<sup>i</sup>

Kelly had been going through some things herself and decided she wanted to brighten the day of her neighbor, who was a total stranger. She left a note for the little girl, pretending to be a fairy named Sapphire. She said she made the little tree her home and would leave a gift for the little girl. But first, she gave the little girl a quest to prove that she was worthy and kind and brave. She asked her to say nice things to others, to do helpful things, to love others, and to draw a picture for the other fairies living in the tree. The next night, the little girl wrote back and detailed all the nice and helpful and loving and brave things she had done along with a personalized drawing just for the fairies. Now, in case you are concerned about stranger danger at this point, Kelly did leave her personal contact information with the girl's parents so that they could be assured that this was all innocent.<sup>ii</sup>

So, the little girl Eliana and the fairy Sapphire became sort of pen pals. They struck up a friendship and made the lockdown more whimsical and beautiful for both of them. This continued for 9 months. Then, the little girl's mom told Kelly that they were moving away and Eliana was having a hard time with it. So, with the mom's permission, Kelly went to work and

dressed herself up as Sapphire the fairy. She arranged with the mom to let Eliana “catch” her leaving a letter and a gift. She told Eliana that she was moving, too, and that gave her the special power to become human size to help with the move. They met and giggled together. Eliana asked her every question she could think of about life as a fairy. Her mom confided in Kelly that Eliana truly did become kinder and more creative once she started chatting with her fairy friend and Kelly was lifted from her loneliness and heartache.<sup>iii</sup>

When God created Adam, Adam had a job to do – to tend to this brand new creation, to work the soil, and enjoy its fruits. He had a job to do and only one restriction. But working, eating, sleeping, and starting all over again are not enough – God wants more for us than that. About from the first moment of creation, God says, “it is not good that the man should be alone.” Up to this point, God’s voice has called forth everything that is and called it good: light and the dark are good, the dry land and the sea are good, the plants and trees are good. Yet, here, for the first time, God says something is not good. We were made to be connected – first to the image of God and then continuing out to the rest of creation. God wants a helper, a partner for Adam.

So, just as Adam had been formed from the dust of the ground, now all the animals and birds are formed from the ground as well. And now God has a partner in creation, in naming, in celebrating each new life that comes forward. God in three persons cannot be lonely. This newly minted creature echoes back to his origins. How will he find companionship? God opens the way for Adam to name, for Adam to explore and discover each new living thing – to delight in them. They are his friends, but they are not the same as him. To have a partner, he will need one like him, one who reflects God, one who can scratch the surface of eternity together with him.

This is the first story of loneliness. This is the story of a God who calls us to connection and hope. Adam could not conquer loneliness alone; it was divine mercy that brought love and

the thrill of knowing and being known into his life. Eve and Adam were kindred spirits, our first example of human love, our pioneers of human closeness and frailty.

Loneliness can be such a powerful force. It can burrow into our hearts and remake our perceptions. As it grows in strength, it can bring us to the point where we start to feel alone even when we are in a room full of people, even surrounded by friends and loved ones. This longing to be seen, to be with people who really “get you,” to love and laugh together – it’s not icing on the cake. In many ways, it is the cake.

A study came out recently that revealed a worrying trend – people are getting lonelier. According to this survey, in 1990 three percent of men said they had, “no close friends.” When the same question was asked in 2021, fifteen percent of men said they had no close friends. That is five times as many! Similarly, 2 percent of women said they had no close friends in 1990 and 10 percent said the same in 2021. There’s also been a dive in the number of people saying they have larger numbers of friends, but I won’t bog you down with all the numbers.<sup>iv</sup> As we have isolated and locked down, taken on new safety measures and kept our distance from each other for more reasons than one, it seems that we have been feeding a loneliness that is getting out of control. From stress or exhaustion or maybe simply from habit, many have gotten used to avoiding others, holing up, and learning to live with loneliness.

God tells us that it is not good for us to be alone. God calls us into community. Sometimes community is formed with a chance encounter like Sapphire and Eliana – but don’t you see the grace of God working there? Our God, the source of love, formed us from the ground. Though sometimes we become estranged from God, from our own hearts, from one another – we are reminded that through Christ, by the power of the Spirit, through faith we are being rooted and grounded in love. Loneliness is disconnection and love is connection. Here, in

the body of Christ, we are being reconnected with every breath, with every prayer, with every act lived in hope. One thing that I think this community does incredibly well is to love and embrace one another, to open wide the doors for the stranger, to serve with generous hearts. As more and more people fall prey to loneliness, this church is a good place to find a friend and that is a holy thing, indeed. Here, you can be yourself and you can find Christ dwelling in hearts all around you. Week after week, I see you all offering this precious gift to one another, to visitors and to strangers, and it fills me with joy. Sometimes the smallest gesture roots out the weeds of loneliness – and see what blossoms in the fields of love!

And so, gracious God, lead us to our own moments of fairy connection: where strangers become friends, where hearts are strangely warmed, where your grace and peace spread farther than we'll ever know. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://twitter.com/saysthefox/status/1337598289080770561>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://theweek.com/politics/1002095/the-politics-of-loneliness-is-totalitarian>