



Mt. 28:16-20  
What Might Jesus Say To...  
The Beatles

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Today we continue our series that we started on Christmas Eve with a look at what Jesus might say to some famous people. These are hypothetical conversations. I make no claims to special knowledge about what Jesus actually would say – though we can search the Scriptures and see what he does say to them and to us. This morning we're looking at what Jesus might say to the Beatles.

No study of pop music, or even pop-culture, could exclude the Beatles. In fact, many would argue that they're the place you begin. No artist has sold more albums than the Beatles, with 183 million albums sold in the U.S. alone, and at least 600 million world-wide – some say a billion. The next closest artist for album sales in the U.S. is Garth Brooks (that's probably a mistake, right? 😊) with 157 million, then Elvis Presley, with 118 million albums sold. And even today, more than 50 years after they broke up, and just over 43 years since John Lennon died, the Beatles are a pop culture force: They had a #1 song just a couple months ago, 60 years after their first #1 song (which is itself a record). Many people have grown up on their music, memorized the words to every one of their songs, been to their concerts, mourned the deaths of John Lennon and George Harrison, and generally been in awe of the cultural icon known as “the Beatles.”

You would think all that success and adoration would lead to a sense of joy, satisfaction, and connection with people. But as you dig into the lyrics of many of their songs and as you look into their lives, it seems that they were anything but joyful, satisfied, and connected.

Take John Lennon, for example. Born in 1940, his parents split when he was five. His dad, Alfred, was a ship steward and was often gone for months at a time. As a result, their relationship was strained at best. From 1946 until well into the years of Beatles' fame, John did not see his dad.<sup>1</sup> “In 1970, when he severed his relationship with Alfred, Lennon still felt rage over the neglect from years before. **‘Have you any idea what I've been through because of you?’ he screamed at his father. ‘Day after day in therapy, screaming for**

**my daddy, sobbing for you to come home. What did you care, away at sea all those years?”** (**LENNON LIVES FOREVER** ; Mikal Gilmore. *Rolling Stone*: Dec 15, 2005.) His relationship with his mother wasn't much better, and in fact John was mostly raised by an aunt.

John Lennon, as well as the other Beatles at times in their lives, was lonely. Loneliness is in the lyrics of many of their songs: “Help!,” “Yesterday,” “Eleanor Rigby,” “When I’m 64,” “Yer Blues,” “I’m a Loser,” “Fool on the Hill,” and more. They include the theme of loneliness in the title of what we all know is the best album they ever recorded: *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Loneliness is front and center in many of their songs. And while many of the songs that are saturated in loneliness were written by Lennon: John, Paul, George, and Ringo each took their shots at the subject of loneliness in their songs. Now, admittedly, there is always a danger in assuming that song lyrics are autobiographical; oftentimes they are not. But I think in the case of the “Fab Four,” their lyrics reveal much about their view of the world and their experience of the world.

So, what might Jesus say to these four lonely men? I think he might say, **“You are not alone in this world. You were created by me out of love. And while you may feel alone at times, I am with you even until the end of time, and I invite you into my presence and my community, the church.”**

Loneliness is something that we all feel from time to time at a minimum. For many, however, loneliness is much more pervasive. People feel lonely for all different kinds of reasons. People who have lost loved ones often feel lonely for some time afterwards. People who are going through medical challenges often feel lonely. The elderly often feel lonely. Loneliness is considered an epidemic on college campuses across the U.S. right now.<sup>2</sup>

People who are lonely often feel there isn't a solution to it; they often feel alone even when they're around other people. Churches, shopping malls, parks, restaurants, even in their own homes surrounded by family can be

some of the loneliest places for some people...Loneliness can be a part of people who are married, single, extroverted, introverted, men, women, young and old. Loneliness knows no boundary, and it's not going away.

But Jesus and his church are the ultimate antidote to loneliness. And rather than what *I* think Jesus might say to the Beatles, let's see what he does in fact say to them as well as you and me, in **Matthew 28:16-20**. This is God's Word to you and me today...

**Jesus promises here that he would be with his disciples always even until the "end of the age." In other words: at all times until the end of time.** He'll be with us here in this life, even though we can't see him, and forever. And his presence on earth didn't end when the Disciples died. We're not alone, because through the Holy Spirit, his presence is always with us and continues on into eternity.

In an interview with Rolling Stone Magazine shortly after the Beatles broke up, Lennon said, **"You're born in pain, and pain is what we're in most of the time. And I think that the bigger the pain, the more gods we need" (John Lennon).**<sup>3</sup> Pain in many forms is certainly a part of this world. And the pain of loneliness is prevalent – though it certainly didn't begin with the Beatles when they sang "Help, I need somebody".

In fact, God deals with this throughout Scripture: **Throughout the Old Testament, the repeated promise of God to his people is this: "I will be with you."** In Genesis 28:15, God says to Jacob in a dream, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go." In Exodus 3:12, when God is telling Moses to speak to Pharaoh on behalf of his people, God tells him, "I will be with you." As Joshua prepares to lead the Israelites after Moses' death, God says to him, "I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." In Isaiah 41:10, we read these words from the Lord, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." In Haggai 1:13, we hear the Lord telling the prophet and God's people, "I am with you." So, God consistently declares, "I am with you."

And in the NT, the angel tells Mary to name the baby Emmanuel, which means what? God is with us. He's with us right here in this place. He's with you in your life. I don't want anyone to feel uncomfortable here, but why don't you to turn to the people around you and say to them, **“God is with you.”** Whatever you're facing, whatever you're going through God is with you.

And yet the pain of loneliness carries on in many people's lives. People try to fix loneliness in many ways, rather than turning to Jesus. And the problem is that all of those ways are temporary. We certainly need people in our lives, but people let us down and sometimes we expect too much of them, etc.; material things (stuff, money, etc.) offer no lasting comfort, and social media is ironically titled because it actually exacerbates our sense of loneliness, and even causes of much of the loneliness in today's world.

Pepper Rodgers was a former head coach of the UCLA football team – he passed away in 2020. As his team suffered through a poor season in the early 1970s, he came under intense criticism and pressure from alumni and fans. “My dog was my only true friend,” Rodgers said of that year. “I told my wife that every man needs at least two good friends—and she bought me another dog.”<sup>4</sup>

The antidote to the pain of loneliness isn't more dogs, and it isn't more gods, as Lennon asserts. I would suggest to you that we need Jesus. **Jesus is the antidote to loneliness.** Our first and only true friend is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one who can make and keep the promise, “I will be with you until the end of time.” Not just until the cows come home or until you throw in the towel or kick the bucket...not just in the good times: but all the time, and beyond all time. He's the one who says, “Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, my rod and my staff, they comfort you” (Psalm 23). Only God in Christ can offer peace and a presence at all times, even when we're facing death.

You may be aware that Lennon had some interesting views on Jesus and the Christian faith. In a 1966 interview for the British publication, *The Evening Standard*, John Lennon made this comment: **“Christianity will go. It will**

**vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first - rock 'n' roll or Christianity.'”<sup>5</sup>**

As many of you know, this comment from Lennon about being more popular than Jesus caused quite an uproar. It made headlines around the world. But he might have been right. When you look throughout the course of history, it’s hard to find a time when Jesus has been real popular, quite frankly. Not that “popularity” was his goal, but he sure didn’t win a popularity contest even in his own day.

So, even though there was a time in John Lennon’s life when he followed Jesus, his presumption that Christianity would disappear and his eventual dismissal of Jesus seems to show that he did not truly hear the words of Jesus and enter into a relationship with Him. As a result, he appears not to have known the one God who is with us at all times, in all circumstances, bringing comfort and compassion in the midst of loneliness and pain. But this is what Jesus offers, still today, including to you and me. He is *with* his disciples, always, to the very end of the age. So...The first antidote to loneliness is having a relationship with Jesus.

Some people might say, and perhaps some of you here this morning might, “Yeah, but Jesus isn’t right here with me. I can’t touch him. He can’t physically hold me or hug me. So, I *feel* like he’s not really there.” And many people, in times of loneliness or grief, feel this way. **This is why Jesus gives us the second antidote to loneliness: The Church.** The presence of Jesus Christ is with us through his people, the Church, because the Church is the body of Christ. This idea that the Church is the body of Christ is found throughout the New Testament Letters, including Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians. And so...**When we enter into a relationship with Jesus, we must do so through the church, which is his body.**

Studies are done every year or two on the state of relationships in America. The most recent one, done in the spring of 2021 – so yes, just after, or near the end, of the pandemic depending on how you defined the “end of the pandemic.” But still, it found that half the American population has fewer

than three close friends.<sup>6</sup> All of our social networking and technology that helps us stay in touch with people: and we are really less connected on a deep level than we were previously (previous studies show people having more close friends). Many Americans have no sense of community. We need community and a place to belong. And the Church is the best of that kind of community. This doesn't mean the Church is perfect – it's not. Well, ours is...but all the others aren't. ☺ Just kidding! We're imperfect like the rest. But the Church has the most potential, because it's built on Jesus who never leaves us or forsakes us.

Unfortunately, many people try to have a Christian faith on their own and even Christians struggle with loneliness. Until the last several decades, this solo Christianity was almost unheard of! Dietrich Bonhoeffer (German pastor, ended up in solitary confinement in a Nazi prison camp) said in the 1940's, "There's no such thing as a solitary Christian." So, if you're trying to live your faith on your own apart from the Church, you're swimming upstream; it's not what God intends; it's not how you're built. You need the community of faith, the Church, to walk through life with you.

**And: The key to connecting with others in the church is this: Get plugged in. Get involved.** Don't just show up for worship on Sundays – or worse, just watch online – and then walk out the doors until the next week. God has created you to be connected to the rest of the body of Christ, the Church – to minister to others and to be ministered to. This is why we're having the Ministry Fair in a couple weeks – to help us be more connected to the body of Christ here at Rose Hill. God calls you and invites you to be on mission for Jesus together, baptizing and teaching others to obey what Jesus teaches, as he says in this Matthew passage.

Jesus is the head of the church, and the rest of the body – the Church – stems from there, all connected to one another. That's straight out of the New Testament - 1 Corinthians and Romans. With Jesus leading us, we work together to build up the body – no stray body parts floating out away from the body. You see, when God says "I am with you" throughout the OT, almost always it is in reference not just to a person, but to the community. When Jesus said to his disciples that he is with them, he was speaking to them as a

group. God is with all of us, and we belong together. We belong to God, and to each other. Put that together, and loneliness can be combatted.

There are two kinds of people here this morning: Those who are struggling with loneliness, and those who aren't. If you struggle with feelings of loneliness, and you wish to sing songs with lyrics such as, "Help, I need somebody?" or if Eleanor Ribgy's opening line – "look at all the lonely people" – resonates with you...If that's you, then Jesus is saying to you, as he might to the Beatles, **"You are not alone in this world. You were created by me out of love. And while you may feel alone at times, I am with you even until the end of time, and I invite you into my presence and my community, the church."** You might *feel* lonely, but the *reality* is that Jesus is present. This is one of those places where feelings can lead us astray, and it's why our faith starts with the renewing of our *minds*, to *know* who Jesus is and that he's real, and really with us through his people and through his Spirit. Then that knowledge gets down to our heart and the rest of us so that our whole lives are transformed by Jesus. But it starts up here (the head) with our minds, not here (the heart) with our feelings.

So, if you're like the Beatles and you're crying out for help in your loneliness, and you need somebody, not just anybody, you're on the right track. The answer is Jesus Christ. Don't believe in "Yesterday," believe in Jesus. You also need a little help from your friends...and the best of those are people in the church who can share with you the eternal love and presence of Jesus Christ through their lives. Give yourself and your loneliness over to Jesus. If you've already done that, then reach out to those around you, and befriend someone, get connected to the body of Christ to combat the loneliness that someone else might be feeling. And may each of us know that: You are a child of God, and loved deeply by him. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> LENNON LIVES FOREVER; Mikal Gilmore. Rolling Stone New York:Dec 15, 2005. Iss. 989, p. 57-58, 60, 62, 64, 166 (6 pp.). Found here: <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2005/11/30/168768/->

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/physical-mental-health/2023/11/08/new-epidemic-gripping-college-campuses-loneliness>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid footnote #1.

<sup>4</sup> I'm not sure where I got this, to be honest. It was in a document of a collection of stories I've maintained over the years.

<sup>5</sup> <https://slate.com/culture/2016/03/it-s-been-50-years-since-john-lennon-s-bigger-than-jesus-quote-but-the-rest-of-that-interview-was-even-more-shocking.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://nypost.com/2021/07/27/americans-have-fewer-friends-than-ever-before-study/>