

A Hidden Grief and Hope for Tomorrow

Psalm 31:9-16, Matthew 5:4

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*Be a comfort to me, Beloved, for I am
in distress;
my eyes are dim from weeping,
my soul is deep with grief.
For my life is worn away with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
My body has weakened and my bones
waste away with misery.*

*All my fears rise up to mock me,
my neighbors turn away,
My friends dread to see me and
flee from my sickness of soul.
My mind, too, has left me
like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
Yes, I hear the voices around me
whispering of my plight –
fears rise up on every side!
Isolation, rejection, fear surround me
and conspire to overwhelm me.*

*Still, I trust in You, O Beloved,
I repeat, "You are my Life."
My life is in your hands;
deliver me from the fears which
separate me!
Let your face shine on me;
hold me in your steadfast love!*

- Psalm 31:9-16 From Psalms for Praying by Nan Merrill

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Matthew 5:4

Are you mourning? Are you grieving?

When that question sinks in, when I really ask it to myself, I realize a more accurate question is

What are you grieving and mourning right now?

Take a minute and call it to mind and heart.
Those situations and people you are mourning.

I am grieving the death of my brother Jim. It has been 8 months since he died suddenly. It was good to be with my extended family two weeks ago to celebrate his life and grieve together. I realized I had not really let myself grieve. Delayed mourning. Tears flowed as well as moments of deep gratitude and laughter. It was healing. Grief is an interesting journey.

I am grieving with you the death of people of our church we love – Alan Pabst, Sean Castle, Darlene Nickel, Grant Pritchard, Binny and Chuck Fischer.

And the world feels full to bursting with things that deserve mourning, that cry out to be mourned.

Hurricane Ida and catastrophic flooding and damage...

Wildfires – Caldor, Dixie and more...

COVID 19 virus and Delta variant... and the 600,000+ people who have died

Afghanistan the loss of life during the 20 year war and grief over what is next...

The climate crisis...

Voting rights being blocked ...

The abortion law in Texas...

And on... and on...

There is no shortage of very serious, very present, and very real alarm bells out there that make life feel unhinged. These are dire, sad, and trying times.

I have had many conversations lately about this collective sense of grief and loss. Personal grief and collective grief. It feels heavy.

Take time to lament. Many of the Psalms are Psalms of lament, of individual and collective lament – naming the sorrow, the loss, the fear. Bringing that to God, to the Holy One. Asking – where are you? How long? And naming a hope, fragile, glimmer, a sense that we are not alone in this lament.

When we are grieving over the loss of someone we love and grieving in a larger context of collective loss or trauma, it is often hidden. I came across a podcast recently called Hidden Grief. Saran Sidime is host. She has deep conversations with people about different kinds of grief and how often it is hidden – maybe hidden with anger, hidden under calm exterior. And yet there is a sorrow or sadness that is there. I listened to her interview with Jan Richardson, favorite writers. Her husband Gary died suddenly in 2013 following surgery for a brain aneurysm.

+ Need bear witness to our grief, not hide it.

+ Grief changes over time. No one path – not stages, not a map. Pain does not go away but it can be intertwined with love, wonder, gratitude and even joy. Pay attention to those moments.

+ So many losses we may be feeling or aware of. It feels overwhelming. Reminder that when we love deeply we experience deep grief. We are learning how much our hearts can hold. We help each other hold that loss and grief. Something about grief that wants to be seen, be known, and to find solace together.

+ This grief can create an openness. See the broken pieces . Allow the Spirit to move over those broken pieces. Not whole the way it was but a new sense of wholeness. This gives me an ongoing hope in my life. (1)

Grief became a national conversation with death of Briana Taylor and George Floyd and so many others. It became a national conversation with the pandemic.

Saran Sidime’s question: What would it mean for the well being of society to expand the common understandings of grief to include other kinds of suffering and loss? And how do we find and practice hope?

The Psalm reminds us *Let your face shine on me; hold me in your steadfast love!*

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount described the Kin-dom of God, life as God means it to be shared, to in on the miracle of Divine Love here now.

Those who mourn are in on the miracle, for they will be comforted.

This word for mourn is gut-wrenching grief – it’s the strongest possible word for mourning. Blessed are those who are in absolute abject despair.

And comforted here is the strongest possible word for comforted – not comfort as in comfortable, like hanging out in a familiar place with a hot cup of tea and your feet propped up. But comforted as in completely propped up on someone else’s strength. Comforted here is not a pat on the head and quiet word, but a walk-alongside, holding up word, carrying with you the enormity of your burden. (2)

Blessed are those who find themselves in gut-wrenching grief, because they will be held up and carried by someone else’s strength. They discover life as God means for it to be shared.

Mourning in many times and cultures is an official act – a communal practice, designated by certain dress and behavior, bracketed by time frames and carried out with rituals. Throughout history people have found ways to be “in mourning” for the loss of those they love. But in our time and place, we’ve lost most of those customs – we no longer wear black for months or sit all night with the body of the departed, we don’t wear arm bands or exempt people from social obligations for certain lengths of time. In fact, when great loss comes, most of us don’t

know how to mourn. And even more so in the collective grief over climate change and concern for our country and democracy.

So we often keep our sadness pent up inside and private. Whatever rules there used be that shaped a space for it, these days there is very little to guide us. We get a funeral, a visitation, some meals from friends and cards from coworkers and distance from acquaintances. And then things move on.

But there's a difference between sadness and mourning – sadness is a feeling, - you might have a shot at keeping sadness kind of in check. You might be able to be sad and still fake it. But mourning is an action. Mourning is grief in motion, sorrow exposed, emitted and shared. Mourning and grieving are sadness made verb.

And so we hear inside these beatitudes - Blessed are the real, Blessed are the authentic. Blessed are we when we live the way we're wired to live.

When we cry when we're sad, and laugh when we're happy, and hold one another up when we're falling, and lean on others when we're are wobbly.

Mourning is an essential part of being human, and to live fully we need to mourn, just as we need to celebrate and we need to sleep and we need to eat.

We come here with our hearts open – our broken hearts and our weary hearts and our grateful hearts and our determined hearts—and the prayers of those gone before. In the timelessness of the Holy One, we are part of this community that bridges time and space, transcends continents and centuries. We are woven together – a community of faith.

I know we are going to get through this. This part, and the part that comes after. We are going to get through it. We will let ourselves feel it – both the grief and the gratitude, we will let it break our hearts open so we can embrace more of this life that is so generously given to us. We won't be afraid to celebrate, and we won't be afraid to mourn, and we'll even be so bold as to do both at once when the situation calls for it.

And we won't just get through - because God will use even this, this extraordinary, unfathomable muddle of a year, to bring us deeper into hope, wider into love, to bring healing and hope into this world that needs it so badly. God will use these experiences in this time to open our hearts to see the big picture that we are made for and called to, to help us welcome this life that we are given to share with each other in this the world.

Lament, comfort, fullness, wholeness, hope....

May each of you and all of us together be open to receiving and sharing these! Amen.

1) A Hidden Grief Podcast – “A Cure for Sorrow” 8.4.21 [A Hidden Grief podcast](#)

2) Rev. Kara Root, “Sadness Verbed,” 2.8.14 [Kara Root blogspot](#)