

## **“MAKING SPACE FOR GRIEF... AND HEALING”**

Psalm 90; Luke 6:17-31

November 3, 2019 ~ All Saints Sunday

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Somebody said to me the other day, when we were talking about grieving, “I feel like a broken record.” And I said, “But grief IS like a broken record.” The same thoughts, feelings, stories, questions going around and around in your head over and over. Afterward, I started thinking of other things grief is like: It’s like a weight you carry around with you. It’s a journey into an unfamiliar place, with no map or directions. It’s a wall that closes you off from those around you. It’s a hole, an empty space, a wound. So many metaphors... that perhaps is an indication of how hard it is for us to talk about and think about and deal with this universal human experience.

Last year, on All Saints Sunday, we had seven names on our remembrance list. This year we have 22. We are mourning mother, father, spouse, child, brother, best friend, grandparents. We grieve the loss of co-workers, companions in church leadership, folks we made music with, faithful worshippers, one of the founding members of this congregation. Collectively, we are carrying a heavy burden of grief for these losses of people who meant so much to us.

And that is before we take account of our grief at the state of our world... or the myriad other losses we have absorbed – loss of health, changes we didn’t choose, the ways life and people have disappointed us.

It’s heavy.  
We feel it.

We feel it not only in sadness, but also in tiredness, anger, guilt, forgetfulness, depression, sleeplessness, inability to eat or concentrate, numbness, loneliness, anxiety, all kinds of conflicting emotions. Because grief isn’t just one thing – it’s a whole messy complex of things. And it isn’t easy.

Grief doesn’t have a comfortable place in our culture. It just doesn’t fit very well into our society that is so big on things like

- Optimism
- Happiness
- Strength
- Problem-solving and fixing things
- Being in control
- Winning
- Self-sufficiency
- Efficiency

There is not much room in that collection of values for grief.

It's no wonder that when we're grieving, we often feel we have to pretend we're ok when we aren't. It's no wonder we try to submerge grief in busyness, or turn to substances to deaden the pain. It's no wonder we sometimes buy things to fill the emptiness and sometimes try madly to get rid of things that are reminders. It's no wonder we grab on to foolishly sentimental clichés to try and make grief seem less like a raw wound or an uncontrollable storm.

Some of those things are healthier than others; some may help, or seem to help, for a while. But in the long run, none of these things really help us deal with grief because they *don't* deal with it; they essentially push it aside or cover it up. But it's still there.

Healing can only begin when we make space for grief. When we give it the time it needs. When we tell the truth about it. Respect its needs. Listen to it. Live with it.

I believe the church is uniquely qualified to make space for grief.

+ We are people who believe in the value of truth; Jesus said, "the truth will set you free." Even if that truth begins with "I feel lost and desperate."

+ We are already called to a way of life that is countercultural to the values of "strong, happy, and successful." We understand – because Jesus teaches us - that God is close to the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, the excluded.

+ We already know that we don't have to be strong or perfect or have all the answers – those things are God's job, not ours.

+ We know about letting go and holding on lightly, because our faith teaches us that neither our loved ones nor our own lives ultimately belong to us but that we all belong to God.

+ We have the Psalms to teach us that it is ok to cry, and scream at God, and beg for help... and to give us some words for all that.

+ We are not unfamiliar with suffering and death; we have the cross at the center of who we are. I do really believe that one of the things Jesus' death is meant to do for us is to teach us not to turn away from suffering.

+ We know that to be truly human is to love, and that the price of love is grief. Jesus taught us that.

+ We know that suffering leaves scars. Think of Jesus' hands and feet. We know that the things we go through change us.

+ We know about “sharing our burdens.” It’s a hallmark of what it means to be the body of Christ, that we suffer together and rejoice together.

Because this is who we are, we do have the capacity to accept, to make space for, grief.

We aren’t afraid to talk about death. We can cope with tears. We can say, “It’s terrible. We don’t know why.” We can listen. We can let people feel what they feel and be as they need to be, without rushing them to “move on.” We can give each other grace for all the ways grief makes us a little crazy and sometimes not 100 per cent present.

Grief is hard. Community is hard sometimes, too. But community is a great blessing in grief.

In community, we help each other remember that this is a journey, that the progress is sometimes slow, that unexpected things happen – both good and bad.

In community, as individual as our experiences of grief are, we have companions for our journey.

In community, we remind each other to be patient as the one-step-forward, two-steps-back process of grieving and healing unfolds. And we gently try to help each other to grieve in ways that are healthy, honest, and helpful.

In community, we help each other remember Jesus’ promise that although we are weeping now, we will be comforted. The scars of grief will still be with us, but the time will come when there is also space for laughter and joy... and we will be able to receive it, and accept that, too, as a part of what it means to be human.

In community we help each other to trust – to trust in God love, the Spirit’s healing power, and the compassion of Jesus who suffered grief, too.

In community, we help each other hold on to resurrection faith that believes there is new life on the other side of death... both for our loved ones who have died and for us who have to find a future for ourselves. Sometimes the community even holds that faith for us, until we can get a grip on it again.

In community, we help each other to affirm that “in life and in death, we” and our loved ones “belong to God.” That’s the communion of the saints we celebrate today.

Resource:

*Grieving: A Beginner’s Guide* by Jerusha Hull McCormack