

Release and be renewed in God's comforting peace February 27, 2022

Let's come out of our time of shared stillness by taking a shared breath, and arriving again, at this very moment, just as it is.

Wherever we are, God is. And all is well.

As I said in my welcome, preparing for today's message felt like heavy lifting this week. My holy heartbreak was very present, and while last Sunday the shoulders I stand on inspired my peace of mind, even time spent in the joy and comfort of hours with my little grandson couldn't completely lift me beyond the heartaches of a world on the brink of disaster. In fact, as I took in the news from Ukraine, all I could feel was grief-- grief for the people of Ukraine, grief for all of us and the sorrows we hold close in our hearts.

"I like to travel through life lightly with a happy heart. But sometimes I am laid low by a seemingly insurmountable obstacle or loss...I open to my feelings of sadness and sorrow and seek the comfort of God's presence in myself and in my loved ones."

On Thursday night, the voice of God's presence sounded just like the voices of my spirit group. When it was my turn to check in, out came that heaviness, and I admitted I wasn't sure how I could lift up my beloved community this week, that I was finding it hard to point myself toward the light. I also shared that I had received the gift earlier that day of being seen-- that a friend had reached out and asked, "How's your self care going? Have you put your oxygen mask on lately?"

Seen, loved, and challenged.

When we came around to discussing *The Book of Joy*, our current book, Sam pointed us to the Dalai Lama: "We have to take care of ourselves without selfishly taking care of ourselves. If we don't take care of ourselves, we cannot survive. We need to do that. We should have wise selfishness rather than foolish selfishness."

What does wise selfishness look like? To me, it looks like listening to the voice of that wise friend reminding me to pause, to rest. It looks like diving deeper into my spiritual practices of prayer, meditation, journaling. It looks like nourishing my body with good

food (including a cookie or two) and gentle movement. It looks like remembering that everywhere I am God is...

Douglas Abrams points out an interesting paradox in this conversation between Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama: “How much control do we have over our emotions? The Archbishop would say we have very little. The Dalai Lama would say we have more than we think.” Yes!! It’s a both/and.

Grief and sadness. Joy, delight, anger, frustration. The myriad emotions we experience often arise *seemingly* unbidden. And yet those emotions arise from situations, from experiences that we label good or bad and that we sometimes cannot control. Tutu reminds us “we ought not to make people feel guilty when it is painful. It is painful... At some point you will be in anguish.”

Can we *feel* those feelings, find the information in them, not stuff or ignore them or feel guilty about them? And yet can we also commit to practices that help us refrain from *reacting from* our emotions?

What a gift of comfort comes when we are vulnerable enough to admit we’re in pain. As we went around our Zoom room Thursday night, listening with our ears and hearts to each other, just knowing that we each carried something-- a physically challenging pain, a heartache, a loss, a worry-- somehow lightened the load, it didn’t add to it. Seeking the comfort of God in each other, we find it...

Yet finding comfort in God’s peace does not mean the grief vanishes, nor that we should deny our grief and sorrow. Sometimes the voice of God comes in the form of a book passed along from a friend (thank you Deb!).

Although I am not even close to finishing ***The Wild Edge of Sorrow***, by Frances Weller, his grace, wisdom and compassion are a solace and a challenge. He writes:

“*Bringing grief and death out of the shadows is our spiritual responsibility, our sacred duty... We must find the courage... to walk it's wild edge. Grief is always, in some way, accompanying us. There are times when the presence of sorrow is*

acute... sorrow is a sustained note in the song of being alive. To be human is to know loss in its many forms. This should not be seen as a depressing truth. Acknowledging this reality enables us to find our way into the grace that lies hidden in sorrow. We are most alive at the threshold between loss and revelation; every loss ultimately opens the way for a new encounter.”

Finding our way into the grace that lies hidden in sorrow. Weller walks us through what he calls the 5 gates of sorrow, and I know there is much in this book, in this walk on the Wild Edge of Sorrow for us to explore, but for this morning I will bring us towards two of these passageways that resonate:

The first gate is simply “everything we love, we will lose.” [Grief] is one of the voices of the soul, asking us to face life's most difficult, but essential teaching: everything is a gift, and nothing lasts. To accept this fact is to live on life's terms and not to try to deny the simple truth of loss, what the Buddhist call *impermanence*. When we acknowledge grief, we acknowledge that everything we love, we will lose, no exceptions. It is the bittersweet embrace of love and loss that sharpens our appreciation for those we love...

...illness is another grief we find at the first gate. Any lingering illness can activate a feeling of loss. When a prolonged sickness arises in our life, we lament the life we once knew and enjoyed, the one brimming with vitality....When our health deteriorates in illness, we feel diminished, whittled away by loss after loss...When we experience the loss of someone or something that we love, other places of grief can rise from their hiding place and ask for attention.

Let's pause here, and just let that truth wash over us. Feel again as we did in the meditation, the voices of our personal loves and losses as they whisper to us. Feel those sorrows held gently in comfort and compassion.

The next gate that feels so present to me this morning is what Weller names the Third Gate, The Sorrows of the World.

“The third gate of grief opens when we register the losses of the world around us. Whether or not we consciously recognize it, the daily diminishment of

species, habitats, and cultures is noted in our psyches. Much of the grief we carry is not personal, but shared, communal. It takes everything we have to deny the sorrows of the world... When we open ourselves and take in the sorrows of the world, letting them penetrate our insulated hut of the heart, we are both overwhelmed by the grief for the world and in some strange, alchemical way, reunited with the aching, shimmering body of the planet. We become acutely aware that there is no “out there;” we have one continuous existence, one shared skin. Our suffering is mutually entangled, the one with the other, as is our healing.”

We live in a time where our communal suffering is incredibly hard to deny--and it's really hard to deny since I remind us almost every week! The news from Ukraine shows us the path of violence, authoritarianism, and destruction. Covid 19 has claimed the lives of nearly 1 million people in our country alone. It is impossible to not see and hear the language of division, of polarization, of separation.

Yet our vision and mission calls us to something different. Our path and purpose as a community is to walk in the Truth of our Oneness, of our full Divinity AND our full humanity. As we awaken to that light, the spiritual work of bringing grief and sorrow out of the shadows is part of that call.

Christian churches around the world celebrate the “Transfiguration” today, when Jesus brings his disciples (and us) to the mountaintop to pray before entering Jerusalem, and the voice of God calls out “This is my Beloved.” I’ve always loved the humanness of Peter: “Hey, Lord, let’s just stay here with Moses and Elijah! This is great!”

We Beloveds don’t stay on the mountaintop any more than we stay on the cross, but the light of our mountaintop experiences cushion us in the dark days; they feed our remarkable courage, and strength. They feed our ability to do as Rumi says and, “Tend to your vital heart, and all that you worry about will be solved.

The next true thing helps us find the grace that lies hidden in the loss, and

The Book of Joy and the Wild Edge of Sorrow echo each other's truth, and the truth of our shared mission:

When we share our communal losses, when we hold each other in grief, we are the voice and heart of God. We transmute the pain and sorrow into the bedrock of joy and peace that are our birthright as Beloved of God. Together, we bring each other the larger perspective that helps us hold our own grief with self-compassion. Together, we feel our grief and anguish as a call to BE light in the world.

The Love of God enfolds us...call into your mind-heart's eye, those people in your life in need of compassion and comfort... your beloveds, and strangers alike... those with sorrows close to home...and those whose lives are in peril around the world... and see them covered in a blanket of warmth, a blanket of love...every tender heart held in the hands of the Divine mother-father God... now release grief and sorrow and and renew patience and compassion... and know that We are the Love of God.

And to our beautiful Prayer of Protection, I'll add in closing [*A Prayer for Those in Danger*](#) by Rev Steve Garnass-Holmes (slightly abridged).

God of mercy...

we pray for those in danger today,
for all who know oppression, injustice or
fear,
whose land is invaded,
or whose home is unsafe.
Be with them and shelter them in your
love;
give them courage and hope;
enfold them in your grace.
Touch their wounds; heal their trauma.
May the strength of the earth be theirs,
the freedom of the sky, the peace of the
trees.

We bear in our hearts all who are afraid.
May they bear our love in theirs, for we
are one.
In the unity of your Holy Spirit
you hold us together as one humanity,
one world, one body, one hope.
May your Peace change the hearts
of those who misuse power.
May the Peace of Christ
be with us all.
Amen.