

“What Now?...Living With Grief”

The Reverend John H. Brock

Don't just listen to the Sermon...Ponder how you can live it!

Use these questions as a starting point to dive deeper into the sermon each week. Can be used individually, with family and friends, or with your Life-group!

1. Up until the quarantine, what were some of your biggest losses? Did you find any hope during/after that time?
2. What has been your biggest sense of loss during this time of covid? How – if at all – have you found hope now?
3. How do you strive to help those that you encounter who are going through their own grief?

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Our gospel text is perhaps far more relevant today than it was ever intended to be. The longer this quarantine goes on, the more we all feel anxious sad worried concerned. All of us are feeling grief and dealing with loss. And our text is talking about loss, suffering, pain, grief. And how do we keep on living?

Our story focuses on two individuals who have, from the sound of their conversation, lost their way. They are mourning the loss of their leader, their mentor, their teacher, their friend. These two people are mourning the loss of the one they thought, the one whom they believed, was THE Messiah. I don't think we should be surprised that these two individuals, after last seeing Jesus beaten, bloody, and hanging on a cross, could not recognize an apparently healthy and hale, fully clothed man, talking and walking with them.

The story as we heard it from Luke's gospel: Two people, one named Cleopas, the other forever unidentified, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus (about seven miles to the northwest, on the other side of the

mountains). Somewhere along the route (personally, I'm guessing just as they're leaving Jerusalem), they run into a fellow traveler. This new individual notices their mournful faces, and whether as just to make conversation, this individual asks them,

Hey, guys, what're you talking about?

To which they respond,

What, are you the only person in all of Jerusalem who doesn't know what's been going on?

To which Jesus gives this excellent, 21st Century answer:

What things?

So, Cleopas and his friend launch into a retelling of the past three days (because, remember, this is happening on Easter evening. We hear this story three weeks later, but in Luke's gospel, it's happening afternoon of the day Jesus rose from the dead). When they finish their tale of sorrow, their new friend gives them a verbal dope slap that amounts to *“Are ya stupid? Did you not pay attention to what he told you?”*

And then mounts a counter to practically every negative that they gave: how they are slow to not see that this Jesus fellow really is who he said he is; and how everything that happened to him was in fulfillment of scripture.

It's not until they arrive at their destination, and stop for dinner, that they recognize Jesus. When Jesus breaks the bread, and gives the meal blessing, their eyes are opened, the light pours in, we can almost hear the angels sing “Hallelujah!” and Cleopas and his buddy realize that it's JESUS who has been walking and talking with them this whole, entire time!

Wouldn't it be great if that could happen in our own lives? Because when we are mourning, when we are in grief, we want, we need, we desperately desire, for that hurt, that emptiness, that aching, open, festering wound of our grief to be GONE! Vanished, in a snap of the fingers, in the blink of an eye. But it doesn't work that way. We have to work through our grief; we have to live through our

pain. We have to wait for the planet to rotate enough times before we feel like we have the energy, the ability, to get out of bed; or talk to another human being, or eat, or sleep, or think, or anything.

Because that's the way that grief works. It SUCKS the ever-living LIFE out of us. And so, sometimes, in order to not get bogged down by being grief-stricken, instead, we get angry. We look for someone else to blame. Because it's got to be SOMEBODY's fault I feel this way, it's certainly not MY fault!

But I think that is exactly when we need to remember this story of Cloepas and his friend on the way to Emmaus. EVERYTHING they had, EVERYTHING they knew, had gone up in flames, there on the cross. Their entire world – their hopes, their dreams, their desires, their faith – DIED on that tree less than seventy-two hours ago. And then, they run into some, some yahoo, some uninformed stranger, who has No Clue Whatsoever about why their world has come crashing down, and what does he do? He has the gall to call them “foolish” and “slow.” I gotta tell ya, in the midst of my own grief, if someone had the audacity to call me “foolish” or “slow,” there stands a very good chance I'd rip them a new one. And that would not be helpful to Anyone.

How each of us respond to our grief; how we respond to this quarantine; how we each deal with losses in our own lives, speaks volumes. It speaks as to how we live with others. It speaks to how we witness our faith, by our actions and by our words. Grief tends to make us want to strike out. Yet our faith calls us to remember that God knows what loss is like, as well. Jesus died. God the Father suffered the loss of the Son. Even knowing that the resurrection was coming, God still experienced loss, and grief, and mourning.

We need to remember that we, too, live in the promise of the resurrection. We, too, live in the hope that this quarantine will end; we live with the promise that we will get a vaccine (maybe not as quickly as we'd like, but we will get one).

Life didn't look the same for the disciples after the resurrection. Life won't look the same for us after quarantine. Yet we continue in that hope, in that promise, of life. And, we live with the hope that we will be gathered together again; we live with the knowledge that grief is not the end and the quarantine is not forever. We live with the understanding that whatever our loss is: the loss of a loved one; the loss of employment; the loss of income; the loss of security; the loss of...whatever; in the midst of our grief and loss and hurt, God is with us.

God is with us to help us get through that pain. We may not get the outcome we want or desire. That's not necessarily important. God is with us. God will get us through. Of this, I am certain. Amen.