

May 31, 2020 – Finding God in the midst of grief

With Sara Brown, Funeral Celebrant

Let us centre ourselves for worship. If you would like, have a real, battery-operated or imaginary candle available.

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

Light a candle and say the following

Loving God
You live in us through the Light
Thank you for always being with us
For giving us the courage and strength
To let the light into our lives.
May the light we share illuminate our lives
with change and opportunity.
Amen

OPENING PRAYER

Send your spirit upon us this day, O God
Touch us with the flames of your love
Stir us with the power of your word
Then send us out in the power of your Spirit
To share the love of Jesus with everyone.
Amen

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 27:10-17 (The Message version)

Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.

Then God was right before him, saying, "I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I'm giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they'll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go, and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."

Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, "God is in this place — truly. And I didn't even know it!" He was terrified. He whispered in awe, "Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God's House. This is the Gate of Heaven."

MESSAGE: Finding God in the midst of grief

This message has been prepared by Sara Brown, Funeral Celebrant, for the Faith United Milton congregation on May 31, 2020 and is also shared with Palermo United. ©Sara Brown 2020. Provided here with permission.

VIDEO: Sara has provided us with a video of her message below and it is available at this link:

<https://youtu.be/MyR8bIH3XTI>

Please note that the link takes you to Youtube. Not included in the video is the ONE MORE THOUGHT segment at the end of the message, so after listening to the video please read that part of Sara's message.

Hi everyone. Today I wanted to talk to you all about grief. Many of you know I am a funeral celebrant and I talk about grief a lot. Grief expert David Kessler tell us, "Grief is the death of something."

It could be the death of a loved one, relationship, divorce, job, community and more. There's loss as you age and your body no longer does what it used to or when you have to give up your driver's license.

When I talk to people these days as I hear them share their experiences, I'm hearing a lot of grief. There is now this collective loss that we are ALL feeling ...

Some of the challenges that many of us are facing today include the loss of:

- Routine
- Work
- Gathering for meals, coffee dates, dinner parties
- Gathering for worship
- Physical connection
- Concern for our loved ones who we know are struggling
- So much more

So many things that we've lost that we used to take for granted.

So my first point is that I think it's important that we recognize this and name the grief for what it is. Secondly, it's so important that we allow ourselves to feel the grief. As David Kessler says, "You've got to feel to heal it." Ignoring it won't allow you to move through it.

And I can tell you that I've experienced this truth in very real and personal ways recently because not only have I been grieving alongside everyone else with the pandemic, but I have also been grieving the loss of my marriage, my home, and the life I thought I would have.

Several months ago, Drew and I came to the decision that after trying to heal our marriage for four years, we had come to the end of the line. The kids and I moved from our four-bedroom home to a two-bedroom apartment two weeks before the world shut down. Yes it's been a lot and I have had many days and nights of trying NOT to feel, but too numb through social media, Netflix... even alcohol at times.

I actually don't feel guilt or shame around these activities. None of them are all-consuming, and let's be honest, we can't sit in the hard feelings 24/7. The brain will often turn to numbing because it legitimately needs to!

But it's been my experience that at some point, if you're open to it, your spirit will gently nudge you to look under the carpet and face what you may have been consciously or unconsciously sweeping under there. During the times I have listened to that nudge, out comes an outpouring of sadness and grief for the reality that I'm now in. Out comes the anxiety and fear about the future and all of the unknowns. I'm not gonna lie; it's not been fun. These times of pausing and tuning in to how I'm feeling in the present moment have been emotional and often downright messy.

I think the idea of actively grieving can scare us because it isn't linear and it's impossible to control. I personally like to tuck messy emotions into a neat package – keep them contained. I talk about grief all the time, but it's not so easy to “practice what I preach”. But the more I have allowed myself to feel AND invited God into those sacred spaces, the more I've recognized that it's not a bottomless pit that I'll never recover from. That even when I feel like I'm at the end of myself ... there I still am, and more importantly, there God is with me.

The Psalmist writes: “Though I walk THROUGH the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”. Unfortunately, it doesn't say “though I take a detour around the hardest parts of the valley”. It's not even soaring over the valley; it's THROUGH.

But it's THERE... in the valley of the shadow of death, it's there in the mess and muck and wretchedness of allowing ourselves to feel the pain and grief, that I truly believe God is at work.

I think about the story of Jacob in Genesis 28. Jacob has deceived his father Isaac and stolen the blessing that was rightfully his brother Esau's. Esau is so angry and he wants revenge. So Jacob is running away. He's scared. His brother wants him dead and while he's on his way, he stops to sleep. His pillow? A rock. Clearly the dude is not “living his best life”, as the kids say!

But then he has a dream where God speaks to him and essentially says (paraphrased): “Your descendants will be so many that they will fill the earth. I'll stay with you and do everything I promised you.” Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, “God is in this place — truly. And I didn't even know it!”

I'm wondering if you can relate. When you look back on your life, can you recall a difficult time that you went through but then now think, “Wow, God was right there and I didn't even know it”?

In closing, the questions I want to leave you with, my friends, are these:

What losses are you grieving these days? Are you being invited to take a peek under the carpet and sit with some of the hard feelings? Is it time to try to surrender, “to feel it so you can begin to heal it? “

I wish I could say that I believe we'll always get Jacob moments, that we all eventually get to look back and say, "Wow! God was there and I didn't even know it."

But maybe it could be enough to simply try and get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Maybe we trust that whether we get to find meaning from our suffering or not, on this side of heaven, we know a God who says, "I get it. I know how you feel. I know what it feels to weep with grief. I know what it means to be at the bottom of the pit. I know what it means to be human and scared and asking Father God to 'take this cup from me' and 'Why have you left me?'"

Friends, my prayer for us all is that one day we will look back at 2020 and declare like Jacob did, "Wow! Look at how God was at work. I was sleeping and didn't even know he was there all along."

ONE MORE THOUGHT:

I recognize that you may not feel like you're "in the bottom of the pit". You might be experiencing "mountain top" joy or more than likely, somewhere in between. But no matter where you are, there are all kinds of ways that we can also make steps towards hope and joy.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- Have weekly Zoom, FaceTime, or phone dates with friends or family.
- Do your hair. Wear something that makes you happy.
- Start a gratitude jar and fill it with 3 things you're grateful for each day.
- Watch a movie with your grandkids or other loved ones (in your separate homes but at the same time). Call to discuss your favourite parts afterwards.
- Make someone else laugh.
- Brainstorm ways to do something for something else. (Moving from inward to outward-focused.)
- If you're able to get out for a walk, make a point of saying "hello" to everyone you meet. Create a sense of "human connection" wherever you go.

Ultimately it's all about "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus". Feelings come and go. God remains the same: faithful, trustworthy and full of love. So what is Love asking of you today?

HYMN – Spirit Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6arsF6RW5I>

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

God, I thank you that you are a God who cared enough to come down to this earth, fully human, so that you could give us the gift of solidarity. The words “We are all in this together” are getting thrown around a lot and yet I know that there are times that many of us feel alone.

Would you continue to wrap your arms around each of my brothers and sisters listening right now with your comfort and peace? Would you give us all the courage to name any grief we are in, allow our bodies and hearts to feel all the feelings and meet you there in the midst of it.

We believe; help our unbelief. Amen.

GO NOW IN PEACE: Faith video (link takes you to Youtube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdUap5fcp4k>