

Tears and Laughter

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, August 4 2019)

During my recent stay at mom's place in Rosalind, the peacefulness of her yard lent itself to opportunities for reflection of the past year, and in particular the months of May and June. During that time, I received many requests for memorial services and internments, and continued to receive requests while on vacation from families who are dealing with loss and a need for closure.

Sitting on the swing one day I thought about the many shared moments of loss that I have experienced with families in the 27 years of my ministry. I recalled how the losses brought about by the deaths of young children, suicide, murder, and accidents were especially hard. Through these experiences I have learned that people deal with loss differently but always found their own ways to cope with the challenges and the grief that affected them so deeply and completely. We have all faced hurts, disappointments, and loss in our lives, and as much as we would rather not experience them, they are a part of life.

I have learned also that if we are open and willing to embrace these experiences fully, we find that there is always something to be gleaned from them. Today the themes of the reflection are loss and laughter because both were a part of my experiences with grieving families. These are some of the musings I had as I sat on my favorite summer swing.

READING 2 Corinthians 1 vs. 4-6

The Reality of Loss

In his book *Against the Dying of the Light: A Parent's Story of Love, Loss, and Hope*, author Leonard Fein shares his experience of loss after his beloved daughter, Nomi, died. He writes, "For there is nothing of greater

certainty than this: Every moment of every day, the spinning wheel stops somewhere that it is not supposed to, somewhere that makes no sense. Every moment somewhere, a parent is bereaved, a child is untimely orphaned, a job is lost, a relationship ends, a reassurance is destroyed, a family breaks apart, or a dream dissolves. When this spinning wheel stops, there are no answers to the questions we ask of why it stopped, it just does.”

In his book *Stillness Speaks*, Eckhart Tolle writes, “Whenever any kind of deep loss occurs in your life – such as loss of a loved one, friend or colleague, the death of a pet, the loss of a job, a serious illness of a loved one or of one’s self, the loss of a relationship, or one’s physical abilities – something inside dies. You feel diminished in your sense of who you are. There may also be a certain disorientation.”

Loss can be unbearable. When someone or something which has been part of your life suddenly dissolves or leaves you, it creates a hole in your heart, a tear “in the fabric of your existence.” Dealing with a significant loss can be one of the most intense challenges of a person's life, and with loss comes sadness, grief, fear, and sometimes hopelessness. We may cry out against the unimaginable, or the unexpected sense of insecurity or the disturbance of permanence.

What I have discovered from my encounters is that inevitably a new awareness is acquired, or an understanding is gained, or a new insight changes one's life. Our losses are often fertile ground from which new life grows.

Reflecting on the death of his daughter, Leonard Fein writes about his hope in this way: "God is in this loss. God invites us to raise questions not to back off from the search for meaning in our loss. Even as we search for meaning, we know in our hearts that many of our inquiries will remain unanswered. There are limits to human understanding." What we can know of life and what loss teaches is that there is always more and more to come, more to learn, more to realize, and more to experience.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the 20th century English writer, said, "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction." I can truly say that no matter how tough the situation of loss was for a family, I have been blessed by their wisdom, fortitude, courage and strength.

well hair-sprayed hairdo. As it squirmed and mewed loudly attempting to free itself everyone erupted into laughter, and for a moment, we experienced a calm within the pain of grief: tears and laughter rising from the same heart-centre.

As I sat on the swing, I found myself laughing because that memory is still so fresh and funny. It got me thinking about all the moments of laughter that have occurred over the years in my meetings with grieving families. During times of loss, community and family support are invaluable, and laughter offers pinpoints of healing light. It may seem odd to speak about laughter during times of loss and grief, but it can bring much needed moments of relief and comfort, even during the most challenging of circumstances.

Laughter is a heart-enlivening, spiritual, and healing act. According to Jesuit priest and theologian Karl Rahner, “A good laugh is a sign of love. It may be said to give us a glimpse, or a first lesson, of the love that God bears for every one of us.”

In the Bible, the word "laugh" appears for the first time in Genesis 17 and 18. Here we read about Abraham who falls facedown laughing and Sarah laughing silently in the tent when they hear the news that Sarah

Theologian Doris Donnelly said, "A sense of humour is the saving grace that allows life to emerge from ashes." Sometimes, laughter is the best medicine.

There was a woman who was visiting a church one Sunday. The sermon seemed to go on forever, and many in the congregation fell asleep. After the service, to be sociable, she walked up to a very sleepy looking gentleman, extended her hand in greeting, and said, "Hello, I'm Gladys Dunn." And the gentleman replied, "You're not the only one, ma'am. I'm glad it's done too!!!"

My friends on that note, the reflection is done, so let's sing "Give to Us Laughter.