

Grief

By Pastor Jim Preisig

I want to reflect with you on grief and grieving as a Christian.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” For years that seemed incomprehensible to me. Where is the blessing or comfort when you are so stricken with grief that you wonder how you can even survive? When the agony of loss so grips your soul that it leaves you numb and disbelieving? Where is the blessing in that?

It was years ago, while still a student, that I read C.S. Lewis’ “A Grief Observed”, and the truth resonated in my soul, bringing a measure of understanding. Then years later, there was an “ah ha!” moment as I watched “Shadowlands”, the beautiful movie about Lewis and his brief marriage to a terminally ill woman. In one memorable scene they were off on vacation together when they stopped to admire the gorgeous landscape. Anthony Hopkins, playing Lewis, said words to the effect, “Do you realize that the joy now will be part of the pain to come?” and in an instant it made sense – the blessing of God.

If we so desired we could inoculate ourselves against the pain of grief by simply refusing to love or be loved by another. Then when they died we would feel no loss, suffer no grief. Can you imagine a more unendurable hell than to refuse or deny yourself love? If you allow yourself to love, truly, deeply, passionately, you will inevitably grieve, but in the grieving there is the blessing of love that was shared and savored, and that is not only the source of the pain but its anecdote. For with time the pain is transformed by love into precious memories of loving moments shared.

Ah, and do not forget the promise of comfort that Christ offers. Jesus said, “You have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” According to the Bible, there is a place in heaven that Jesus has prepared for you and me. I don’t know what it will be like, just as a babe in the womb cannot imagine what this world is like, but I trust in God entirely, and know in my heart that it will be glorious. And one of the greatest joys and comforts will be to see again those I have loved and entrusted to God. In my minds eye I can see their smiles and hear their laughter!

As a Christian, we are not insensitive to the pain of death and separation. In fact, I suspect that we may suffer even greater sorrow due to the depth of love and the strength of community. We are not mere acquaintances, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. But in the midst of our grief there is blessing and comfort in Christ.

Whenever I lose to death those I love, I am reminded again of how short and precious this earthly life is; and that awareness stirs me. It inspires me to say and do that which I do not want to die leaving unsaid or undone. And there is real joy in living with that attitude of urgency and passion. An additional blessing is that such an attitude seems to tune the

heart to the presence of God. We suddenly become more aware of God's love and blessings in life. Whether it is a great meal shared with family or friends, a sunset at the close of the day, a brief prayer with a hurting soul, a hymn that causes your heart to soar, an embrace that touches the heart or a conversation that stretches the mind, God's love is revealed in the living.

Perhaps there is someone you need to call or write or speak with? Earthly life is far too short and precious to risk regrets. Don't miss the chance to share what is in your heart,