



## WALKING IN THE DARK Chaplain Robin Russell August 8, 2021

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*  
Galatians 6:2

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* John 13:34

### 1. *GRIEF IS UNIVERSAL*

"Life is difficult." – Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

*He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.*

*They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.*

*Then he looked up at his disciples and said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.*  
Luke 6:17-21, 24-25

No one can live on this earth very long without being initiated into the fraternity of the bereaved... eventually we all become "persons of sorrow, acquainted with grief." -- John Claypool, Tracks of a Fellow Struggler

"We step close to the way of Jesus when we step into our own pain and the pain of others." --Henri Nouwen

Most modern churches in America haven't helped us develop a theology of suffering.

"We want to present Jesus as the answer man, and we don't want Jesus to look bad. And if that's your theology, Jesus can look very bad at funerals." – Michael Card, A Sacred Sorrow

## ***2. OUR NEED FOR LAMENT***

Lament is crying out to God because things are not right in the world. Lament is one of the most direct paths to praise.

*Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* Psalm 10:1

*Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless ... call the evildoer to account for his wickedness.* Psalm 10: 12-13

*But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. ... You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.*  
Psalm 10:14, 17

"Prayers of complaint are still prayers of faith. They represent the last refusal to let go of the God who may seem to be absent, or worse, uncaring." -- Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*

"Churches should be the most honest place in town, not the happiest place in town." -- Walter Brueggeman

### ***3. HOW TO HOLD SACRED SPACE***

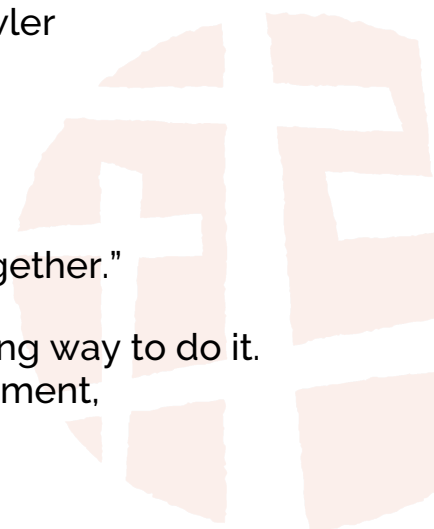
Making space for someone else's pain is a sacred task. It protects the ones who are being vulnerable, and honors their humanity and suffering.

"Seeing pain close up is like seeing a garment turned inside out and all the rough seams are showing. You see someone's absolute humanity shine through all the pain, and that vulnerability makes them more, not less, beloved. ... You might feel like the bad thing. You are everyone's reminder of frailty, of life's cruelty. Your chronic pain or depression or regular scans remind those around you that life isn't as fair or easy as they hoped." -- Kate Bowler

#### **A. Practice empathy and compassion.**

The word "compassion" literally means "to suffer together."

"Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment,



emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of 'You're not alone.'" -- Brene Brown

## **B. God is already at work in people's lives.**

"Even when light fades and darkness falls—as it does every single day, in every single life—God does not turn the world over to some other deity. . . here is the testimony of faith: darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day." -- Barbara Brown Taylor

"The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing ... not healing, not curing ... that is a friend who cares."-- Henri Nouwen

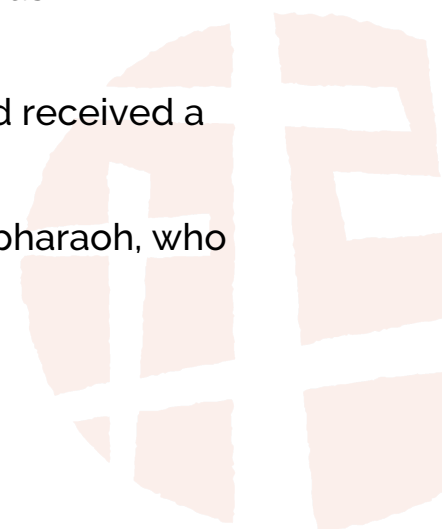
Jesus told his closest friends: *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch."*

## **C. Darkness is often a place of spiritual growth.**

God took Abram outside at night and told him to look up at the sky, and He promised that's how many offspring Abram would have. Abram believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:5-6

Jacob wrestled an angel by a river all night long and received a blessing and a new name. Genesis 32

Joseph's nighttime dreams caught the attention of pharaoh, who promoted him. Genesis 39



God gave Moses the commandments in a dark cloud at Mount Sinai. He entered the thick darkness while the people stayed at a distance and trembled in fear. Exodus 20

Samuel the prophet was called by God when he was a young boy, in the middle of the night. 1 Samuel 3

God spoke to Joseph through dreams, telling him to take Mary as his wife and later to flee with the family to Egypt. Matthew 1 and 2

Jesus was resurrected from the dead in a dark tomb. Luke 24

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.* -- Psalm 139:7-10

"Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift, too."  
--Frederick Buechner



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you find most challenging about trying to help someone who is struggling with painful circumstances?
- 2) Have you ever experienced spiritual growth through a hard time? Where did you find encouragement?
- 3) As a small group, re-read Luke 6:17-25 and answer these three questions:
  1. How does this passage speak to me personally?
  2. What does this passage say about the world around me?
  3. What about this passage is weird, cool or confusing?

