

GREIF AND LOSS

Read Ps 77:1-6

Take a few moments to reflect on what losses you have experienced this year.

Opportunities lost, loved one, could be health related.
Employment, dream relationship

I was reading a book this week in preparation for this message and I was struck again the complexity of grief.

Everyones journey is different. So often we are quick to judge. "Oh, well on the grief cycle you are here." "Oh, it's only a cat. That is not so bad." "When I lost my Dad, this is what happened to me." There is no "right" way to grieve. There might be some things that are less helpful than others, but what is helpful for one person might not be for another. No person can fully understand what we are going through. We can so often think that we know because we too lost a child or went through a marriage break up. But our journey will be different. We can beat ourselves up by comparing ourselves to others. They seem to have come through it OK so why haven't I?

There are no answers. The Psalm we read before asks lots of questions.

Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will he never again be kind to me? Is his unfailing love gone forever? Have his promises permanently failed? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he slammed the door on his compassion?

Key question we ask is Why? Why is this happening?

Job lost his family and his livelihood and his health and asked why. His friends tried to give answers. Half the book of Job is his friends trying to give answers to the question of why. Job calls them miserable. We don't know the answers to why and trying to suggest we do is just hurtful and arrogant.

"This will make you stronger"
"Don't you appreciate how much you have in God."
"It's all in God plan"
"You just need to move on with God."
"You shouldn't feel that way because you have God."
"Everyone has to die at some point."

None of these comments are helpful, and yet they are so common in Church circles. They come from a desire to find meaning and answers, rather than live with ambiguity and loss. We are often drawn to rigid theology because it helps us feel in control. And yet grief exposes these rigid lines as inadequate.

Not only do the answer come from a unhelpful theology but sometimes these questions have come from wrong beliefs we have bought into.

"Life is fair"

"I can control what happens to me"
"God is punishing me"
"If I tithe, God will bless me."
"God will protect me from pain if I am faithful to him"

Loss also exposes these false beliefs and leaves us adrift, feeling as if we have nothing concrete to hang onto. One of the many reasons grief can leave us feeling so exposed is that our nice neat answers no longer seem adequate or helpful.

I don't claim to be an expert on grief. Caroline Loo, Ros, and others worked in this field have far more profound insights than I have. I have also never experienced the loss of a child, or even a parent. My parents are still alive although definitely declining. I do know where the Bible intersects with grief though.

I want to leave you with on thought. God grieves.

Genesis 6:6 "The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart."

This is an incredible thought. The all powerful all mighty God who created the universe, experiencing pain. It broke his heart. He saw life was unfair. As he saw premature death, as he saw tragedy, as he saw evil run rampant, it broke God's heart.

God is perfect and yet his heart was broken. This is a powerful bit of theology to get your heads around. That statement alone blow most of our false theology out the door.

If we go to the NT, we have the famous example of Jesus weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazurus. Why is he crying? He knew that he would raise Lazurus from the dead.

Why did he not just breeze in. Say. Sorry I am late guys. Got held up with all that ministry stuff. Don't worry I can fix this. Just a bit of a hiccup.

Why did he weep. He is weeping over the curse of death that cuts life short. He is weeping over the fact that sickness causes so much pain. He is weeping over the pain that he sees in the community. He is weeping over the unfairness of life.

God grieved over the death of Jesus. I can give you no reference for this. But it would be unimaginable that Father God could have watched Jesus suffering on the cross and not wept. The suffering of Jesus was unimaginable and as anyone who has watched a child or loved one suffer, it almost feels as bad for the person who has to watch.



So when we think about Christmas, and God entering our world, one of his Names for Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.

Not an abstract idea. When we say God with us. Incarnation. Profound implications. God experiencing grief. God not just know about our grief in some abstract way. God is with us in experiencing our pain and grief.

This is where the Virgin birth is not a take it or leave it piece of theology. It was built into the very early Christian creeds. We sing it I believe in the virgin birth. Isaiah 7:14

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. Matthew 1:23.

Just so there is no doubt about it, Matthew clarifies. Joseph did not have sex with Mary till after Jesus was born.

Reason this is so central, is that being fully human, Jesus fully identifies with humanity. And the pain of humanity

He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!

A God who has experienced a broken heart. A God who has experienced the deepest of grief. A God who knows what it is to be weighed down by our sorrows.

And yet a God who is all powerful and all knowing and all present.

That is the kind of God that I want to worship

That is the kind of God who I want to follow

That is the kind of God who we can find comfort in.

We started by reading the first 6 verses of Psalm 77. Writing of grief. Anger. Questioning. Despair sorrow. Let's close by reading the next verses

I recall all you have done, O Lord: I remember the wonderful deeds of long ago. They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about them

Talked about this last week. Faithfulness of God. Look back on.

*O God your ways are holy
Is there any God as mighty as you?
You demonstrate your mighty power among the nations.
You have redeemed your people by your strength.*

How has God redeemed us. NT perspective now of the cross. Redeemed means bought us back. Paid the price for us.

You are the God of miracles and wonders!

I am not sure which is the greater miracle. That Jesus died or that Jesus rose. That God could conquer death makes total sense. That God would die and experience pain and suffering and sorrow. That makes no sense.

As we grieve the losses of this year. As we refuse to push them down. As we refuse to minimize them. As we refuse to spiritualize them away. Maybe we find comfort in a God who grieves and who says I am Immanuel. God with us.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. What has been the most profound loss you have experienced?
What have you learnt from that journey?
What did people do at that time that was helpful or unhelpful?
2. What are some losses you have experienced this year?
- 3.



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS