

## ***Joy Comes in the Mourning***

II Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Today's text is from 2 Samuel, chapter 1; it is about David's poetic lament expressing his grief and despair following the death of his rival and mentor, King Saul, and his beloved Jonathan. Jonathan was Saul's son and heir apparent to the throne; David and Jonathan were the best of friends, compatriots, soldiers tested in battle, closer than brothers, the scripture tells us of their great love for one another, intimate even.

Many scholars agree with this interpretation, and are pushing for a more truthful interpretation and teaching of this relationship between David and Jonathan. One such scholar is Samuel Giere, noted theologian at Wartburg Seminary, who commented on this same passage. He said,

*The full character of the relationship between Jonathan, a warrior in his own right, respected by the people, is not altogether clear.*

*Over the last thirty-five years, there has been a growing openness to, and resulting debate about, interpreting the relationship between David and Jonathan as a homosexual relationship...*

This should be used as an example of biblical affirmation of God's love for same sex relationships.

Not surprisingly, this how I read this scripture as well. I could spend hours developing the history on this subject, but that, will have to wait for another time, along with Friday's US Supreme Court Decision giving gay couples the right to marry in all 50 States. By honestly appreciating their relationship, this can provide clear insight into the depths of David's sorrow, over losing Jonathan, and why he conveyed such words of love and praise to him and great grief over his death.

David's grief is not that different from our own grief. We can experience loss from any number of circumstances: death, rape, a damaged childhood through violence, physical or sexual abuse, poverty, the lost innocence of a child through the exposure to porn, prostitution, parental addictions to drugs and alcohol and sexual exploitation, all, too common in an fallen world, and always damaging the healthy development of a child's psyche and emotional health, with affects lasting a lifetime.

There are large scale tragedies that effect communities, like Sandy Hook tragedy in Newtown and the shooting at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston last week. Certainly, Sept. 11 affected every American, as did the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and too many others to name. Every one of these events will cause, to one degree or another, some sense of violation to our sense of wholeness and rightness. These are irrevocable events and life altering to anyone exposed to them.

We must also acknowledge the potent bedfellows that accompanying grief: sorrow, shame, anger, and despair. Worse yet, with each new loss we experience (and most people have many in a lifetime), these affects are cumulative on our souls and psyches, and often create what is called a "moral injury" which new research is revealing to be the prime component of lasting PTSD effects. I will come back to that.

To best exemplify the complex and convoluted lasting effects upon a person's soul and their coping mechanisms to future events, I will use a personal story, I have told this many times, but sometimes it never fails to stir emotions in me.

When I was a third year medical student, I remember, a male patient, only several years older than myself, being rushed into the Emergency

Room at Oakland General County Hospital, in Oakland CA, where I was training in Emergency medicine at the time.

Imagine if you will, an ambulance radios for a direct path to the O.R. They are bringing in a trauma case that will probably require a cardiac bypass machine (which was not in the E.R.); we (I) were waiting outside to meet the ambulance. I was working with the trauma response team that day, and here comes the stretcher with Paramedics Doctors and Nurses scrambling yelling vital statistics in organized chaos. We head for the elevators and the Chief of the E.D. says to me, “Kent stick your hand on the wound to stop the bleeding in transit.” So I place my hand in the wound pushed, and ran alongside the gurney.

With adrenaline is rushing through my body, I am thinking about all the anatomic structures that could be damaged, blood loss and treatments. Yet, at the same time, I am also preoccupied with cries to God to help this patient—*help me, God, help me please!* As I am thinking of all the things to do for him , I am also repeating over and over—*God help him, God help me, Please, do not let my hand slip off—don’t trip; God please, please, please don’t let him die it will be my fault! God, make my hand stronger! Hold on—he’s bleeding, he bleeding, God stop the bleeding! Please don’t let him die!*

The trauma victim didn’t make it, nor could he have, the injuries were too great, but our team made a Herculean effort to save him.

Afterward, recognizing I did not cause his injury, I also come to terms with the fact I did not save his life. At the time, I was mad at myself and God; it seemed as if God did not answer my prayers, though God has always helped me before. He could easily and instantaneously made me faster,

smarter, stronger, at least better in that moment and this guy would have lived. Therefore, I must share some of the blame for his death.

And God shares in that blame twofold for not helping him or me. From my perspective, then, God was complicit in my guilt and I was a little angry about that. Notice, at the time, in my thinking, it was all about me and what I wanted. In reality, this person's life and death had nothing to do with me. I was lamenting to God my displeasure.

Unrecoverable loss. Understanding this concept helped me: Death is an "unrecoverable loss." Let me say that again, death is an unrecoverable loss. That means, this person's life or your pet's life—the one who passed, who influenced your life, your thoughts, your actions, and who remains in your memories, can never be replaced; that void is never filled by a duplicate, it is not the same, nor can it be. God only made one of them in his vast creation and God will never make an exact duplicate again. So this vacancy left in our life is "unrecoverable." And it is supposed to be this way, so that we honor that life and treasure those memories in our hearts. As long as they are remembered, they live on.

The real task is left to the living to construct a new, different life, without the ones we lose in it. In addition to the death of our loved one, so too, must we simultaneously grieve for the death of our old self that died right alongside that other love. Now this is the tricky part and it is where healing occurs: we must acknowledge that the person we were with the other no longer exists; so effectively, we must have two funerals, burying our lost love and then burying the person we were with them. This is not forgetting them at all.

This is necessary; this forces us to create a new life if we are to continue living, albeit, with some uncertainty and fear about what the

future will look like. This is easier said than done, but with God's never-ending love to comfort us, life gets better. And if we are normal, we will still resent the pain and effort of it all.

I can only imagine David felt some complicity in Jonathan's death. Had Saul not been jealous of David, with David avoiding him, perhaps David and his army would have been with them in that Philistine battle where the two perished and he could have saved Jonathan's life. Or, any of the hundred other would-of's, could-of's, and should-of's; those things left unsaid, tasks undone—these are thoughts that torment our minds leaving feelings of guilt.

Not always helpful are the instructions Jesus gave in Matthew 5:24: "First make things right with *your brother* or sister and then come back and offer your gift..." But, you waited too long, you cannot make it right; you ask, will God hold this against me when my time comes?

This is one example of many circumstances that can cause a moral man or woman to experience a personal theological conundrum; condemning ourselves for thinking, *what I must do according to God's will, I did not do, and now, I cannot do.* Paul struggled with this as well.

This creates another irresolvable moral and emotional dilemma. How do you reconcile this conflict with your faith? This is a type of "moral injury," and it can occur in every type of trauma, warfare, violence, and family relation. Its core cause is shame and worthlessness—both, too, the root causes of PTSD.

Just as important to recognize are the cohabitants of grief: anger and injustice. This often means, we are angry at God for not intervening on our behalf when we needed him the most. This is what the book of Lamentations is about.

First, let's remind ourselves what is meant by prayers of lament, which are paradoxical by their nature. Normally, in our prayers to God, we thank him for our gifts, confess our sins, and ask for forgiveness; we also ask for people in need, and for spiritual growth, and understanding.

On the other hand, a prayer of lament, then and now, means complaining, grumbling, questioning, protesting, being angry, and at times defiant; and usually blaming God for our losses, grief and pain. One can ask, *how can this be part of Christian prayer and not blasphemy?* It is, and it is not.

We live in a fallen world with broken humans whom we share pain and suffering; and as humans, we are not meant to understand everything that occurs in the world, or, to understand the mind of God (God knows this, he is the architect of all this, the good and the bad; he created Satan and evil is allowed to exist). Yet, we must trust that God knows what's right—even when it doesn't feel that way at the time.

It is perfectly reasonable to ask God to intervene in a crisis; it is within His providence to do so, but, rarely is it His practice. Then we ask, *why did you forsake me?* Has anyone here asked that question of God? I have. More than once. I am sure I will again.

It is ok to be mad at God for not doing what you want Him to do. Notice, I said, mad at God for not doing what *you want*, or what I told Him to do. That's pretty arrogant and self centered, even for me! God knows this. That is why he has abundant grace for us. He also teaches; we must learn to wait on Him, until it is his time to act.

To trust that God knows more than we will ever know, or can ever know, is paramount to growing your faith, your obedience, and

humility in the face of uncertainty. It is only because of His mercy, and His grace, that we are saved through faith. Never feel foolish for these feelings when mourning, unless you stay in that space.

Sorrow, grief and mourning will always occur, and should occur; it is in this manner we demonstrate our love for those lost. It is how we show our respect for them, honor their lives, and honor the influence they had upon our lives while keeping their memory sacred in our hearts.

God will not leave us to our grief forever. As with any storm, the sun will shine again; the rain stops, like tears; sorrow fades like darkness from light, and the King is on the throne. This sentiment is beautifully captured in Psalm 30, “I cried to you for help and you healed me...” So even if you think God is angry with you or He is the cause of your current pain and loss, He loves you more than you can imagine. The Psalm continues with,

*...for His anger is for a moment; His favor is for a lifetime;  
Weeping may linger for a night, but joy comes in the  
morning; You have turned my mourning into dancing; You  
have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that  
my soul may praise you and not be silent.*

The church should be a place where death and loss can be a realistic place for grieving and where it can be expressed safely with mercy and grace for healing.

Moreover, God is neither distant nor uninvolved in our lives. Remembering David's lament is a reminder not to move too quickly through feelings of loss; it requires time to grieve

honestly and respectfully and always rely upon God to carry you through the toughest of moments for he promises He will.

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