

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Have you ever met people who have a quick answer when you suffer a loss? People who might say, 'Oh, you'll get over it quickly, cheer up' or 'It was for the best after all'.

Or, especially when we mourn the loss of a child, 'Now the good Lord has one more angel in paradise'.

And maybe the worst: 'You may not understand it now, but God has a plan'

I don't know how these words make you feel, but they make me uncomfortable, especially after my mother passed away, when I was 11 years old and my youngest brother drowned in a lake short before his twenty-first birthday. And don't get me wrong, I know such words are well-intentioned. But the message I get behind such attempts at consolation is 'Everything has to make sense somehow, even if it's bad', or 'Come on, it's not that bad, pull yourself together'.

And perhaps people say such words because they simply don't know how to deal with someone else's grief and pain. And we probably also have to admit to ourselves that we don't actually want to deal with it, because grief and pain scare us, we don't know what to say or how to act - and so of course we want

someone to pull themselves together and get over it quickly so that our relationship with a grieving person normalizes again very quickly.

There is a reason why we have so many grief counselors in this country, people who deal professionally with the grieving - because it is difficult to find real support.

But then we often don't know ourselves how to deal with our own loss and grief. Our environment teaches us to be strong and in control. To pull ourselves together under all circumstances. To smile, even when it tears us apart inside.

So we have a very complicated relationship with our feelings, our grief. And we don't know how to deal with it. I, for example, rarely allow myself to cry, even when I feel like crying. And I think it's not just me: we all think somewhere that we have to be strong and rational instead of emotional, and that happiness is the highest goal in life, and that something is wrong with us if we're not happy. Oh, if only we could allow ourselves to show all our pain and anger and confusion when we are grieving. I know it's out of fashion today, but I think there was a point in mourners wearing black for a while after the death of a loved one. A visible sign: I'm not well. Be careful with me.

Loss, grief, death - what has become of them in our time and our society?

We hide these things. We try to deny that they exist. We relativize them. We don't allow them to really affect us. But think about it: everything that we suppress comes up again at some point, and then with a retribution.

And perhaps even we as Christians are a little guilty of not giving grief the space it needs in our lives: by perhaps being a little too quick to point to the resurrection and often skipping over the reality of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Yes, Christ overcame death and, yes, death has lost its sting, but death is still a reality.

The redemptive and liberating power of Easter morning can only be experienced if we acknowledge the realities of Good Friday.

In all of this, death is not the will or plan of God. Jesus becomes very sorrowful, and he faints in his body when he hears of the death of his friend Lazarus, as we heard in the Gospel for today. A better translation might be that Jesus is upset and frustrated as he experiences first-hand the power of death. That death is a daily reality and that humanity will not be spared. Jesus does NOT speak easy quick words of comfort to those who are mourning. Jesus mourns with them and as ONE of them. And Jesus weeps.

Jesus weeps. This is one of Jesus' most human moments - he shares with us the experience of grief. Jesus weeps, a true fellow human being.

Jesus is vulnerable and shows his despair, he reveals that as a human being he also has his weaknesses and is not ashamed of them.

You may have heard the expression 'WWJD', 'What would Jesus do?' or 'What would Jesus do?' My suspicion is that Jesus would weep. Or even better: Jesus Christ still weeps today because of the power of death. About the fact that death is so destructive, about the fact that relationships are torn apart by death, about the fact that death leaves such large gaps.

And Jesus shows us that it is only human and natural to mourn and weep when we experience pain, loss and death.

What Jesus would not do: tell us in our own pain and grief, well, it's not so bad, get a grip. I have overcome death, why are you crying?

No, we can be sure that God weeps with us. God knows how much a loss hurts us. And God shares in our suffering.

Some famous words from the Bible are found in the Book of Revelation, as John, the visionary, talks about the New Jerusalem: God himself will dwell with people, and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

We come with our tears. We come with what hurts us. That is worthy and right. We do not have to hide our feelings from God, who knows what it means to weep and mourn. And God, like a mother, holds us in his arms and wipes away our tears with a gentle hand. This is a God who wants to be close to us, who touches us and who shares in our suffering. And this is the same God who promises us: I am with you always. Death and mourning and weeping will be no more. Trust me: I share in your suffering, I have even gone through death myself. Come, walk with me into a new life, for behold, I make all things new.