

**OPENING**

GOOD MORNING!

Elaine was married to my good friend Bob. Bob loved sailing. He sailed a lot. A few years ago, when the sailing season was over, Bob was going to sail his boat back to the marina where it would be stored for the winter. Bob kissed Elaine goodbye. She never saw him again. Bob's sailboat was found - washed up on the shores of Lake Simcoe. His body has never been found. Elaine's life would never be the same.

Rebekah was excited to watch the 2013 Boston Marathon with her 5-year-old son. While cheering on the runners, she heard a deafening blast, followed by excruciating pain. After several failed operations, Rebekah had to make the agonizing decision to have her leg amputated. Her life would never be the same.

Sarah was deeply in love with her husband, Carl. Even after several years of marriage, and raising 3 beautiful children, she came home from work one day to find a note on the kitchen table. It was from Carl. He was leaving her. The marriage was over. Her life would never be the same.

My friend Joel had always dreamt of being an airline pilot. He was intelligent, responsible and had a strong faith in God. Joel started experiencing sudden and frequent excruciating pain in his kidneys. It was a chronic condition. Airline pilots can't fly airplanes loaded with passengers, and suddenly without warning he doubled over in agony - unable to fly the plane. His dream was dead.

What each of these stories have in common is significant loss that inevitably results in grief.

Grief is something that is - unfortunately - not well understood in this part of the world. Every one of us will face significant losses in life, and so we will grieve. So we need to learn how to grieve well.

When we think of grief - we typically think of the death of a loved one. But as in the stories I just told - and I could tell you dozens more - there are many ways we humans experience grief. Grief is simply the inevitable pain that comes from the loss of someone we love, or something we value.

So..... what do we do with that grief when it comes? How are we to respond? And especially as Christ followers - how are we to grieve? Is there a right way to grieve? Is there a wrong way to grieve?

Grief can result in chronic depression, anxiety – and a host of other physical and mental changes in us. They have even done brain scans of grieving people and discovered that experiencing a major loss can actually show up in those scans. Grief is real.

Mourning is different. Grief and mourning are not the same thing. To MOURN is to **feel** or **express** sorrow or grief. Grief is what happens to us INTERNALLY. Mourning is how we get that grief that's inside us - out in the open where it can be observed and expressed and shared. Grief is inside of us - Mourning is outside of us.

How many of you have watched the Chosen series? The video series on the life of Jesus. There is a particularly touching scene (meaning it made me cry).

In that scene that comes straight from the bible – Mark Chapter 5 - a 12 year old girl was very, very sick - and her father begged Jesus to come and heal her BUT When Jesus got to the house - the girl was dead. And there were **professional** mourners there. That's right! professional mourners! Now there is a niche job for somebody! People who are paid to come and mourn. Flutes playing. Loud crying and weeping as if they actually knew and loved the girl who died.

It was common practice in that time - to hire mourners after a death. Why? It seems weird to us, but it actually makes a lot of sense. When someone has experienced a significant loss and another person comes alongside them and mourns with them - something very powerful happens.

Not long ago I was at the graveside where a woman was to be buried - and she was far too young to die. I saw her father standing there looking sad but composed. I went over and hugged him and immediately his tears started flowing. It was like turning on a tap. A simple hug. Words weren't necessary. A simple hug. Sharing in his grief – allowing him to mourn.

You know the bible instructs us how we – as a church family are to grieve. The apostle Paul instructed the Christians in Rome to ...

***Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15)***

And to the Corinthian church ..... ***If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26)***

When he refers to a member, he is not talking about “church membership” – His is describing the church as a body – like a physical body – with members. Like our physical body has members – limbs, toes, organs etc. A church family like us here at Southridge is also a body - made up of various members – that’s us – individual members making up the Body of Christ. It’s a metaphor – and a good one.

If that is how God intended us to respond to our losses. To grieve together. How do we go about doing that? Or... If we ourselves are grieving a loss - any kind of loss - how should we express that grief? How do we **mourn** that loss?

Here is where community is so important. Let’s say I find out that one of you folks – in my church family has experienced a loss and is grieving – then I – as your brother in Christ – am responsible to come alongside you – to do my best to comfort you and even commit to journeying through your loss with you. We call that companioning – it’s a good word!

On the other hand, what if it’s me this morning going through something really heavy? instead of me just grieving on the inside – keeping it inside me - I need to be reaching out to you - my brothers and sisters in Christ - **expressing** my grief – and **mourning** - in **community**.

In this part of the world (including here at Southridge) need to do better in companioning with people as they deal with their losses. And I also think we need to do better to be more honest,

more transparent, when we **ourselves** are grieving - and express that grief - that pain – to mourn with our fellow Christ followers here at Southridge.

Any kind of loss - could be a death, a divorce, our health, loss of a dream. We, as brothers and sisters in Christ – members of this church family - we need to be reaching out to those around us who are grieving - suffering. And showing our love. And expressing that love - and allowing ourselves to hurt along with the person who is grieving. Companioning – it's a good word.

**So what tends to stop us from coming alongside our fellow Christ followers who are grieving?**

Well - Maybe awkwardness. Sometimes even well-meaning people will avoid approaching someone who has experienced a major loss. What would I say? What if I say the wrong thing?

Well - initially at least you don't have to say anything - just a hug will let them know you love them and are hurting with them. And as you love and support them in their grief journey - I believe the Holy Spirit will prompt you with the best words – at the best time.

We often miss wonderful opportunities to lovingly come alongside people who have experienced a significant loss - simply because we don't know what to say. And the people who are grieving wonder why people are avoiding them - and that just causes them additional pain.

Are there things you should **NOT** say to someone who is grieving a loss? Definitely! One of my professors at Tyndale University and Seminary has been helping people journey through grief and loss for several decades - and also is teaching me and many others how to do the same. He wrote a book called "Well Intentioned People say Dumb Things" at funerals. And he includes some real doozies!

Ministers hear a lot of things that people both in the church and outside the church - say at funerals. Said with the best intentions – but not helpful.

People trying to comfort the grieving person by saying “well he’s in a better place.” Meaning heaven.

OK, yes, heaven is a better place for sure!

Or.... “thank God She is no longer in pain”

Well, yes – people can go through horrible pain through their sicknesses.

True statements – yes.

But at that moment – what might that be communicating to the grieving person? What message might they be receiving? “Maybe they are hearing – “You really shouldn’t be so sad because the person who died – is with Jesus – and no longer in pain.” And - it really isn’t comforting. Because it sidesteps the reality and significance of the pain the bereaved individual is experiencing.

Other things people might say (or even family members themselves), “well God knows best - it must have been her time”. Or, I have heard this one - “God must have needed him up there more than we need him down here”. The assumption is that God is actively removing people from their families, for some unknown reason. And so, who are we to complain?

I’ve conducted funerals for children as young as 6 months old as well as teenagers and 20 somethings – young moms with young children who really need their mother. And the idea that

God has chosen to take that young person out of their loving family - brings no comfort but instead can cause a rift between them and God. People don't need an explanation for why their loved one died. They simply need love and support.

And I also think there are many Christians who when a major loss hits them - **especially** the loss of a loved one. They are afraid to talk about it - afraid to complain about it. Some people don't even want to grieve and mourn because they think it demonstrates a lack of faith in God. And like I said - They may even feel that God had something to do with their loss - maybe God even caused their loved one's death. That it was God's will that their loved one die.

But I believe God is the author of LIFE - not DEATH.

In fact, when Jesus returns someday to set the world right - what enemy will finally be defeated? What is the greatest enemy of mankind that the bible says Jesus will once and for all defeat? That's right - DEATH.

The writer of the book of Revelation had a peek into the future God has prepared for his people. A vision – from Jesus that will one day become our reality.

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

*“See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them and be their God;  
**he will wipe every tear from their eyes.**  
**Death will be no more;**  
**mourning and crying and pain will be no more,**  
for the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4)*

When Jesus restores our universe to the way he created it to be – sometime in the future – there will be no more mourning or crying or death – death will be no more!

So I just can't see God arbitrarily causing the deaths of our loved ones! He is the author of life – not death!

So - Should a Christian mourn? Absolutely! - there are Lots of expressions of mourning in the bible. Read the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he was arrested, beaten and killed. He **questioned**, He **mourned**, he **grieved**.

*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be **grieved and agitated**. Then he said to them, "My soul is **deeply grieved, even to death**; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, **he threw himself on the ground** and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want." (John 26:36-39)*

And In John chapter 11 When Jesus went to the home of his friend Lazarus to find him dead and in a tomb - it says Jesus wept.

**When Jesus saw** her (Mary) weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was **greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved**. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." **Jesus began to weep**. (John 11:33-35)



Why was Jesus weeping? Because he loved Lazarus and was going to miss him? Jesus knew that he was about to bring Lazarus back to life in a few short minutes! Maybe Jesus wept because he felt the pain and sadness and grief of Mary and Martha - Lazarus's sisters. He **shared** their pain. He **mourned with them** and for them.

Ashley and Aaron Enns gifted us last week with a very personal, and a very honest accounting of their incredibly difficult journey caused by Ashley's cancer. It was beautiful gift to us. Hopefully you were here to hear it. If not, I highly recommend you go on the Southridge website and read the transcript of their talk. Even if you did hear it last week, it would be so worth to go back and re read it.

And they referenced this same story of Jesus and Lazarus and suggested that Jesus wept because he knew – at a very gut level – this is NOT how it is supposed to be. Sickness, death, pain, war, violence, abuse – none of that is how it is supposed to be and I agree with Aaron and Ashley that he likely wept because sickness and death are NOT how it is supposed to be.

In addition to conducting funerals - I also work part time at a funeral home in the area. A month ago, there was a funeral for a 29 year old man who was tragically killed in a motorcycle race. Tyler Seguin. Some of you likely heard about that.

We had likely around 800 people at that funeral. I have never seen so many motorcycles in one place - hundreds of them. Hundreds of men and women in black leather jackets and black leather vests – tattoos and cowboy boots. Hugging each other and weeping real tears.

I watched Tyler's mother - lip quivering and tears flowing down her cheeks - when she heard the thunderous roar of those Harley Davidson motorcycles entering the parking lot - and watched them drive by her - almost like a parade - hundreds of them - there to MOURN with Tyler's family. I was moved. A beautiful demonstration of ONENESS and solidarity with the family. Maybe we as fellow Christ followers could learn something from them.

On any given Sunday - I guarantee there will be someone here who is grieving a loss of some kind- a job, a home, a loved one, a marriage, their health. We can companion with them in their deepest, saddest moments. I think if we, on a regular basis, prayed and asked God to show us people who are hurting, in our church family, I sincerely believe we would begin to see and notice people who really need us to love them and journey with them through their grief.

COMPANIONING - It's a great word!

I would like to invite Joan Hyatt up here as we close. Joan needs no introduction but as a retired therapist she has lots of wisdom from her training and experience.

Separately, Over the years, Joan and I have spent a lot of time with grieving individuals and families. Our training and experience are different - but together we want to be a grief resource for Southridge Church and the wider community.

Joan - maybe you can tell our friends here today what we are planning to make available starting in the Fall of this year.

Thanks Paul;

Paul and I - in our different, yet related experiences with grieving people, have realized that there is a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about what healthy grieving looks like. We recognize the long term emotional, spiritual damage and even physical damage that can occur when grieving is not done in a healthy and holistic manner. A leading expert in grief, Dr Alan Wolfelt says, "you do grief or grief does you"

So, after discussions with some of the leadership team, here at Southridge, our hope is to make ourselves available to anyone who has experienced a significant loss (whether recently or long ago). Or, if there is someone in your life who has experienced a significant loss and you want to come alongside (companion) with them in their grief journey, but just don't know how to go about that, we would like to help you support, you as you support that person.

We would like our training and experience in this area to be a resource for the church and perhaps the wider community. There are many ways to grieve and mourn but our belief is that we do it best in community. To that end we have a variety of resources we can provide: books, podcasts, quiet shared moments over coffee or a silent walk...

And if there is a desire for some of you to be part of a grief support group, we would be happy to facilitate that - perhaps as early as this coming Fall. Please talk to either Paul or myself if that is of interest to you.

Earl Grollman said; "Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness, it is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity" and the quote I believe most strongly is "grief and mourning is simply evidence of great love"

Let's pray;

God thank you for the privilege of grief. Although it is challenging it is also evidence of great love and a good response. The disciples grieved and mourned when they lost Jesus and many of us have lost relationships, jobs, dreams and loved ones...help us to learn to grieve well so that we can be healthy and whole. Help us to support one another in healthy ways...and help us to be a community where mourning and grief are given space and supported in love.

We ask it in Jesus' name,

Amen