

FIERCE LANDSCAPES OF GRIEF



This evening, March 4th, we near the end of the 13th day of the 40 Days of Lent. Our exploration this Season is taking us through Fierce Landscapes of Death, Grief and Holy Living. During this Second Session, we will explore the unavoidable, unpredictable and often un-seeable fierce landscapes of grief. They are landscapes that are part of our journey because we are human. Be assured, we will never walk alone.

Washington State has plenty of “fierce physical landscapes” that I have experienced; among them - the ice fields and glaciers of Mt. Rainier, the eruption of Mt. St. Helen’s and the heavy surreal blanket of ash left in its aftermath, the wildness of the Olympic Rain Forest, the sheer rock face cliffs in Central Washington, winter storms on the Pacific Coast, and sudden snow blizzards between Ritzville and George. None of us can forget the horrific disaster of the Oso Mudslide just last March.

The landscapes of grief are just as fierce, unique, natural and unpredictable; as the physical; however, some of the grief landscapes are internal and not so easily seen. We navigate the pathways of grief through the landscapes of our minds, our emotions, our spirits and our actions. During this second session in the Lenten series, we’ll be remembering and sharing together some personal stories of navigating our landscapes of grief and how we can be helpful companions along the way as others journey through this rough terrain, too.

Please pray with me: . . . ***“God Be With You”***

Our God of Mercy, Love and Comfort, we thank you for your presence with this evening as we walk with care through the landscapes of grief, and the valley of the shadows of death. It is a blessing to us to know that when we are grieving and bereaved we may cast all our cares on you and feel the consolation of your love; through Jesus Christ our Savior. ***Amen.***

What is grief and grieving? What is bereavement?

Grief: noun \ 'grēf\ : deep sadness caused especially by someone's death

Grieving: The Process of Coming To Accept The Unacceptable.

Bereave: Sorrowful Through Loss or Deprivation: “bereft of hope.”

As humans, we will all experience grief and the journey of grieving. It is a fierce journey and not a feeling or state that we welcome, yet it comes with the “being human” territory.

The Nature and Stages of Grief

The Nature of Grief

- * Grief affects our whole being – physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, and spiritually.
Each of us will have different symptoms depending on each individual's circumstance.
- * There is no road map for walking through the process of grieving.
- * There are stages that **most** people go through but they are not a linear progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 to Stage 3, etc. Adj. 1.

The Stages of Grief

- + Shock/denial
- + Anger
- + Bargaining
- + Depression
- + Acceptance

COMMON SIGNS OF GRIEF RESPONSE

<i>PHYSICAL</i>	<i>EMOTIONAL</i>	<i>MENTAL/ COGNITIVE</i>	<i>BEHAVIORAL</i>
Feelings of weakness/ fatigue	Shock/emotional numbness	Confusion/disorientation	Searching for the deceased
Weight loss/gain; change in appetite	Sadness/sorrow/despair	Memory/concentration problems/absent-mindedness	Sighing/crying/“weepiness”
Difficulty sleeping/ change in sleep patterns	Anger/protest/ irritability/resentment	Difficulty with decisions	Carrying objects/ visiting places linked with the deceased
Stomach upset/ diarrhea/constipation	Self-reproach/guilt/ regret	Disbelief/unreality/ “a fog”	Social withdrawal
Feelings of physical numbness/heaviness/ emptiness	Anxiety—general or specific	Depersonalization/ sense of unreality	Avoidance of reminders of deceased or the loss
Back/neck/ muscle pain	Fear of “going crazy”	Lowered self-esteem	Change in sexual desire (increase or decrease)
Headaches	Helplessness/“out of control”/overwhelmed	Feelings of meaninglessness	Increased use of alcohol and other drugs
Chills/sweats/ “cold hands”	Mood swings/ emotional “roller coaster”	Rumination about deceased or death	Telling the story, over and over
Chest pain/tightness/ difficulty breathing	Loneliness	Idealization of deceased	Clinging/difficulty with separations
Dry mouth	Yearning/pining	Need to make sense of the death—“Why”	
Startle response	Apathy/lack of pleasure in anything	Denial/ “not really dead, just gone”	
Restlessness/“wired”/ hyper-activity/ “nerves”	Agitation	Dreams or nightmares of deceased or death	<i>SPIRITUAL</i>
Susceptible to illness	Relief	Suicidal thoughts	Visions/contact with deceased
“Out-of-body” sensations	Peace/calm/ heightened awareness		Loss of faith and meaning
			Anger at universe/God
			Difficulty praying or meditating
			Feelings of presence

Generally, we think of grief as a reaction to a death. However, there are other grievings that can come while someone is still living, as their quality of living deteriorates.

- 1. Chronic Illness:** Parkinson's, Diabetes, Heart Disease, Alzheimer's, Mental Illness
- 2. Ambiguous Grief:** What we experience when someone is still "there" but also not here" e.g. cognitive impairment from dementia, traumatic brain injury,
- 3. Anticipatory Grief:** The grieving we experience when a loved one is dying and walking their journey towards death. The one who is dying is also very likely to feel anticipatory grief.

TIPS FOR OFFERING HELP TO OTHERS WHO ARE GRIEVING

We often feel uncomfortable when approaching someone we know is grieving because it is hard to know what to say or do that will be helpful and comforting.

- * Be available. Offer support consistently.
- * Listen without giving advice.
- * Do not offer stories of your own experience with grief. This can have the affect of the grieving person feeling as if you are dismissing their pain.
- * Allow the grieving person to use expressions of anger or bitterness, including anger against God. This can be normal behavior as the grieving one is attempting to find meaning in what has happened.
- * Realize that no one can replace or undo the death or circumstances. To heal, we must each endure the grief process. Allow others to feel and express their pain.
- * Be patient, kind and understanding (without being patronizing) . Do not claim to know what the grieving person is feeling.
- * Physical and emotional touch can bring great comfort to those who are bereaved. Don't hesitate to give a hug or handshake, if appropriate.
- * Don't force a person to share feelings if he/she doesn't want to.
- * Be there later when family and friends have gone back to their usual routines.
- Remember birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and other occasions you know have important meaning to the one who is grieving/bereaved. Offer support during these times.
- * Don't be afraid of reminding the grieving person of the loved one who has died. S/he is already thinking about their loved one. Share stories and memories. Let them know you miss "_____", too.

- Try to avoid using the term “loss” and speak directly of “death”. The person who has died is not lost, although s/he is no longer among us or living on this earth. Instead of saying, “I’m sorry for your loss”, try instead to say something such as; “I feel sad/sorry/sympathy for you over the death of _____ / or because _____ has died.”
- * Send cards, flowers, deliver a meal, offer to do chores, donate to a cause that is important to the person who died or who is grieving.
- Pray for healing; with the grieving one if they wish, or on your own., that God’s will be done in God’s time.

“Humankind’s Greatest Gift, Also Its Greatest Curse, Is That We Have Free Choice. We can Make Our Choices Built from Love Or From Fear.”

- Elisabeth Kubler Ross