

ANNOUNCEMENTS: June 4, 1972

GREETING We offer a word of warm greeting to those of you who have joined us on this lovely June morning for the first time in worship, and we invite you to be with us for a few moments of fellowship following the service, downstairs in the Community Room. Some punch and cookies will be served, and we shall have opportunity to greet you in a more personal way and to tell you a little bit about the church you worship in this hour. We invite you to leave your name and address in one of our Guest Books and to join us in worship on other Sunday mornings.

COMMUNION For the benefit of visiting friends, we would announce that it is the custom of our church to observe the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month. Participation in the Lord's Supper in this church is not limited.....that is to say that one does not have to be a member of this church or this denomination to receive the Sacrament. It is our conviction that the Table of our Lord is open to all who are sincerely trying to grow in their understanding of the will of God and the ways of the Christian life. We invite and encourage all of you to share in the Sacrament which today will be given to you at the Altar Rail. We trust that the time for you may be an occasion of spiritual rededication and renewal.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT Please remember that tomorrow night - June 5th - is the evening of our special choir program when Hadyn's Mass In Time of War will be presented.

HADYN'S

We look for a good response from the people of our parish. The Choir has devoted a great deal of time and work in preparation for this special occasion. It will be rather anti-climatic if we have poor support from the rest of the parish. As I mentioned last Sunday, we are experimenting in terms of the day and hour of the service.....rather than on a Sunday night when so many are weekending at this time of year, we thought we would try out Monday night and see what response we have. Share the word and plan to be here.

OFFERING Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive"

"THE TIMES OF OUR LIVES"

IV. To Grieve With Hope

INTRODUCTION

Originally I had planned to devote only today's sermon time to the subject of grief, but early on in the week I began to feel that it might be better to spread this concern out over two Sundays. Preaching time on a Communion Sunday is somewhat limited. My own instincts were telling me that few persons would want to sit through a full length sermon on a warm Sunday in June. Besides were due for another parade today and everyone loves a parade. Therefore, we'll launch the subject today and spend about ten or fifteen minutes with it and then pick it up again next Sunday morning.

DEVELOPMENT

Grief is part of the bundle of emotions involved in what it means to be human. As soon as we are capable of feeling any emotion - love, joy, hate, anger - we discover what it means to "come to grief". Among the dictionary meanings of the word "grieve" are these: "to suffer emotionally", "to be in pain of mind because of an evil or sorrow". It comes in assorted shapes and sizes - all the way from a child's sorrow at the loss of a pet or an uprooted residence to an adult's anguish over the loss of a loved one. And that loss is not always through death.

Yes, children know what it is to grieve. Their grief reasons seem small by our adult measurements, but their hurts are very real to them. Mark Twain in his autobiography remembered his seven year old daughter crying her heart out over a broken toy and a picnic cancelled because of rain. With some impatience, her mother told her not to cry over "little things". At which the little girl responded, "Momma, what is 'little things'". And Francis Thompson was getting at the same truth when he wrote:

"Children's griefs are little, certainly; but so is the child. Grief is a matter of relativity; the sorrow should be estimated by its proportion to the sorrower. A gash is as painful to one as an amputation to another".

On through life, we continue to cope with grief in various ways. We "come to grief" in our disappointments and failures and rejections and remorse and sins. We move from a familiar setting to a strange place, and we feel grief. We say goodbye to a child bound for college or a distant land, or to a loved one from whom we shall be long separated, and we feel a particular kind of hurting. We run into snags in our work, or in our health, in our goals, in our relationships with people - and we can be hurt and feel hurt. There are different causes and kinds of this particular emotion that we call "grief". It does come in assorted shapes and sizes. This is what I wanted to establish first-off.

A PARTICULAR KIND OF GRIEF

But there is a particular meaning of that word that we reserve for the time that death separates us from a person very near and dear to us. And in that particular sense, grief is one of the times of life for all of us. You cannot pinpoint it and predict it for one season or age of life. For it can come at any time. The death of a parent or a partner, a child, a close friend - and we experience an intense kind of hurting and anguish and sense of loss.

It is this kind of grief that I want to think about with you both today and again next Sunday - for there are some lessons and some lights to be shared by those who have walked, and to a lesser degree by those who have watched, through the valley of the anguish of grief.

I think it is helpful for us to realize that there are certain stages that a person goes through in this grief process. People and relationships differ, and the same exact pattern does not fit each instance of grief, but there is a certain similarity when grief is real and deep. Studies of grief point up that there are three stages: shock, suffering and recovery. Let me comment briefly on each stage.

SHOCK The first stage, experienced in the immediacy of grief, is often simply shock, and it generally lasts from one day to one month, or even longer. One might say it is characterized as a feeling of lostness, a state of unreality, a difficulty in making decisions. Sometimes a person will accurately diagnose it himself when he says, "I don't think it has really hit me yet".

It is this numbness which sometimes helps to explain the composure with which mourners walk through those difficult days following the death of a loved one. I have often thought that it is part of God's grace - that there is often this state of shock and numbness which is a kind of anesthesia against the deeper realization of grief. Maltbie Babcock, who wrote that lovely hymn, "This is my father's world" was talking about this first state of grief, when she wrote to a bereaved friend, "I do not see what else you can do but just live, now". There is that relatively brief stretch when about all that a person can do is "just live, now".

SUFFERING The second stage is suffering, or as one observer terms it, recoil. It is the most painful stretch, and it can last upwards of a year, or unfortunately, some people never get beyond this stage, and it becomes a permanent stage.

In this state, the numbness has been lifted, and the ability to feel has returned. Loneliness, anxiety, self-pity, bitterness, quiet, remorse claim rooms in our lives. Anger, too - anger at a God who would allow this kind of hurt to hit us - and sometimes even an ambivalent anger toward the loved one who has died for leaving such a legacy of sorrow. It is a time of difficult, mixed emotions when a person is working through his griefs and his hurts.

Ironically, this is the time when a person generally is most alone. The family and the friends who flocked around in grief's immediacy have returned to their work and their ways. For all but the most intimate survivors it is back to business as usual. That part of our response to a friend's grief is worth thinking about. We do so much for a person in the state of numbness - and certainly it is needed - yet often, I feel, we do so little for a person in the second stage of suffering, when the pain is most intense, and the need is so very great. What can we do? Continuing expressions of interest and calls are something all of us can find the time to do. They can mean a great deal.

RECOVERY Then, hopefully, there is the third stage - recovery. It's onset varies with people, but often it becomes evident from three or four months onward. It is not always steady and uninterrupted, but gradually it "involves a letting go of the past and building a new life". It may mean learning to be alone, finding new ways to be useful, growing out of self-pity to self-giving, finding a certain peaceful perspective on life, and in general - responding to light at the end of the tunnel.

And any of us can think of people who beautifully illustrate this third stage - people whose wounds of grief have largely healed, and while the scars are always there, nonetheless they have been enabled to live lives of purpose and service and

even radiant joy.

CLOSING IT UP FOR TODAY

Shock - suffering - recovery. We do well to remember that there are these three stages in grief - both for ourselves and for others with whom we try to walk as far as we can.

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, minister at Riverside Church here in the city back in the 30's and 40's, once observed that much of his preaching at times was nothing more than pastoral counselling on a large scale, on a group basis. I've thought of his comment several times in recent weeks as I have worked on these sermons dealing with certain times and experiences in our lives.

Next Sunday - against the background of what I have said today - but even more against the background of our Christian faith and interpretation of life, we shall consider three statements about the ways in which one can constructively and rightly grieve.

For our closing prayer I should like to borrow that wonderful prayer of Reinhold Neibuhr. A prayer for many occasions in life, it is also a good prayer for that time of life that is grief. Shall we bow our heads in prayer:

"O God - grant me the serenity to accept that which
cannot be changed;
The courage to change that which can be changed,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen"