New Hope Global Sermon 3 23 22 A Dark Room

**Introduction**

****“With my miscarriage came many false hopes for getting better and finding healing within. I **had created a dark room inside my head**, and my heart found it comfortable and comforting to dwell there. That room is grief. It is always there. It is an impenetrable room where I convinced myself that only I was allowed to enter. In that room I didn’t know what to do with myself; sometimes I didn’t know how to get out of it. Some days I didn’t want to get out. . . Grief has a way of not just being a visitor but a constant companion, and it takes time to learn to live with it. . . Grief is not a place to sit alone; it is a journey on which we join others” (Kathryn Ziegler Weber, Never Forsaken, God’s Mercy in the Midst of Miscarriage, Concordia Publishing House, 2018, pp.12,13).

The suffering in the world in our time has caused the experience of grief to become commonplace among the world’s peoples. Millions like Weber, but for many different reasons, have created a dark room inside their head. There is trauma from war, bereavement from death or separated, broken families, failure and unbridled stress, fractured relationships, isolation and suffering due to Covid, the experiences of being hard-pressed. The negative spiral of emotions. All can lead to the dark room of grief.

Grief is also something God has experienced. This Lenten season we are invited to enter the sufferings of Christ on the cross. When He took on all the sins, the shame, the guilt, the infirmities and sicknesses of the world in atonement, Jesus also entered a dark room. That place separated Him from the Father, hence his wrenching cry from Psalm 22;1 ’My God, my God why have You forsaken me?’

So what does characterize A Dark Room and how do we get out of it?

**The Dark Room**

Weber, in the quote cited above, says she created a dark room inside her head. We are holistic beings so living in this kind of darkness also reverberates through the emotions (in the heart) and the physical body. Being in the dark room of grief is an immersion experience. Two more quotes from Weber:

 “Grief veils our vision. We don’t always see things as clearly as we might have before; When we are bombarded with so many questions, doubts and concerns in the midst of grief, we can’t always see that God is present, working, hearing our prayers, and answering the questions of why He has become hidden to us. . ,

 Grief can also make us forget or become deaf to what we have heard. We may already know the answers, but if you are like me, you will say several times throughout your journey, ‘tell me again. I need to hear it again. . .My head knows, but my heart needs to hear it again.” (Weber, Ibid, p. 23)

In another woman’s poignant expressions of grief- in her case due to the sudden death of her husband at age 46 – writing in a poetic genre, she describes grief as an attacker:

 *The Attack*

At times grief envelopes me slowly

 Like a fog

 And doesn’t lift for hours.

Tonight it came swiftly,

 Like a masked bandit,

 It attacked without warning

 While I walked through a store.

I was nearly toppled by it.

 It clutched my throat as I

 Walked beside my girls.

Sometimes I wish I could display a sign:

 ‘Caution – Woman in Grief’.

 It would explain my actions,

 My strange reactions.

But tonight I struggled on with that

 Pressure around my neck.

I refused to surrender, and finally it

 Dropped off.

 I wonder where it’s hiding now

 And when it will strike again.

(Dorothy Hsu, *Mending*, David C. Cook, 2011, p. 52)

 *Giving up*

I felt like giving up today.

“how much more should one be expected

To take?” I railed.

I’m battle fatigues.

Weary from the struggle.

Day after day.

Of pushing ahead.

Battling for every inch.

Keep that chin up!

Don’t look back!

Just keep marching!

Fight the depression!

Fight the fear!

Fight the doubt!

Fight the pain!

Fight!

But don’t complain.

And when I evaluate my position

So little ground has been covered.

All that turmoil.

And what do I have to show for it?

A few more wrinkles,

A few less pounds,

Just battle scars.

(Hsu, Ibid, p. 67)

Hsu also describes the depression and doubt that so often accompanies grief. Of depression she says:

*Depression*

*Depression is*

*Debilitating, defeating*

*Deepening gloom*

*Trudging wearily through*

*The grocery store*

*Unable to make a simple choice,*

*Or to count out correct change.*

*Surveying an unbelievably messy house*

*Piles of laundry*

*Work undone*

*And not being*

*Able to lift a finger*

*Doubting that God cares,*

*Doubting in my prayers,*

*Doubting He’s even there.*

*Sitting, staring wild-eyed into space,*

*Desperately wanting out of the*

*Human race.*

*Viewing an empty bed*

*Two sleeping girls’ heads*

*And screaming,*

*‘Why, why, why,*

*Is their father dead”?*

*Seemingly under control,*

*Until it strikes again. (Hsu. P. 106)*

Grief, doubt and depression are all bed partners, but not attitudes nor lifestyles we should partner with long-term. God certainly understands the reasons why any of His children create a dark room in their suffering. He understands their questions; He has compassion for their suffering. Jesus’ coming is proof of the extent of that God’s intervention on our behalf. Christ came to free us from the bondage to people’s negative emotions and thought patterns. As Jesus said in John 8:34-36: “I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave can’t come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through” (The Message). That’s the bottom line theology all Christians know with their head – even as they remained imprisoned by these destructive emotions in their hearts.

So, **how do we get out of that dark room in our mind?**

I want to suggest 4 strategies for deliverance, each beginning with “s” so they are easy to remember: Share our pain with others – including the Lord! Spend time in the Word of God. Stop listening to Satan. Surrender ourselves afresh to the Lord.

**Share our pain:** Throughout both books cited in this sermon, the women kept sharing their feelings and anger and shame with God, even if they didn’t understand the why’s of their suffering. Like the Lament Psalms in the Bible, they were crying out to God and laying all their sorrow at His door. One woman in Weber’s book said, “I didn’t doubt his existence, but I did, very strongly, doubt His love for me. (How could He love me if He sent me so much suffering?) I doubted my own faith. (What did I even believe anymore when I was so angry and questioned Him so much?) . . [But] I finally learned that God was close by. I saw Him everywhere, and as painful as it was, it was also the only thing that brought me some comfort. In my darkest days, not even the Gospel brough me comfort, but this knowledge did. . . I finally learned that when we in our suffering cry, ‘Where are you God?’ we lift our eyes too high and look too far. He is very close, coming to us, caring for us, and loving us through those He has put in our lives. (Weber. Ibid. . P.22). God has given Christians one another in the Body of Christ so we can share our pain and have companions on the journeys of our lives. As another grieving Mom said, “My dear fellow Christians knew what is meant to “rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn’ (Rom. 12:15). One member of the Body was suffering, and the other members were deeply affected in turn (Weber, p, 88). May we seek out those relationships and be free to share our pain.

**Spend Time in the Word**

The Holy Spirit has been given to believers to open up the Scriptures to our understanding and to bring it in recall to us when we need God’s special words of hope or encouragement or direction or conviction. There are countless times through the years when the Spirit has done this for me – at critical times of suffering or pain or hurt or indecision. The Word is powerful and God promises that it will not return void – it will accomplish the purposes for which God intends it (Isa.55:11). So, we neglect to sit under the Spirit’s work through the Scripture to our peril. When grief or anguished suffering can seem to shatter us in a million pieces, Christ is the One who can hold us together as He holds the universe together by the Word of His power (Col.1: 17): He can lift us out of the slimy pit, put our feet on a rock , establish the right direction for our next step and put a new song of praise in our mouth (Ps. 40:1-3). Those promises are a lifeline we need to hold onto as the storm of suffering rages. They refute all Satan denies to be true about God and claims about the miserableness of our own condition and future.

**Stop listening to Satan**

So, we need to stop listening to Satan. One major effect of grief is that it makes us vulnerable to Satan’s lies and various strategies to defeat us by leading us down negative pathways of depression or doubt or unresolved anger or accusations of God and others. Jesus called him “the Father of lies’(Jn.8:44). The Apostle Paul tells us we defeat Satan by putting on the whole armor of God every day (Eph.6:11-17). Revelation tells us that Christians defeat Satan by the word of their testimony (based on God’s character and Word) and the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). Jesus Himself told the early disciples – just before all the evil and sin unleashed at His crucifixion - that Satan was coming but they were not to fear. “He has no power over me” (Jn.14;10). Christ’s victory through His resurrection becomes the believers’ victory as well. Satan must flee when we resist him in Jesus’s name and the blood of the lamb.

**Surrender again to the Lord**

Thus, the final “s” is surrender. Even when the circumstances surrounding our grief or doubt or storm-tossed soul persist, we need to declare what Peter did when the Lord asked him if Jesus’ hard teachings would make him leave as others were doing: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. And we believe and know that You are the Holy One of God” (Jn.6:68-69).

And that is our bottom line, isn’t it? There are times when the ways of God are a deep mystery or even seem unfair and uncaring. Until… we remember the proof of God’s extraordinary love and mercy on the cross and the earth-shattering victory of His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

At those times the hymn “Be still my soul” was a hymn I have sung in God’s presence over the years when I had unanswered questions of God that clouded my vision of his blessings and victory, but needed to reaffirm my faith and renew my confidence in the Lord:

 Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side. Bear patiently the cross of grief and pain.

 Leave to thy God to order and provide. In every change He faithful will remain.

 Be still my soul! Your best, your heavenly Friend through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still my soul! Your God will undertake to guide the future as he has the past. Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake. All now mysterious will be bright at last. Be still my soul, the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while on earth below.

(words: Katharine von Schlegel, Music Jean Sibelius)

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord, we count on Your victory in these days. You are the One who safely guides the future as You have the past. May there be many stories among Your people of Your deliverance. You are the One who can deliver us from our dark places we have created or that seem to have been created around us. As we are brought once more into Your light and freedom, may Your light be seen in our stories – for Your glory. Amen.

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 Pastor New Hope Global Fellowship 3/23/22