

Horisun Memorial Service

Welcome to the HoriSun Memorial Service in Summer 2020. I'm Laurel Crusinberry, one of the chaplains for HoriSun Hospice.

This message is for those of you who have lost someone you love in the last year. You've experienced a profound loss that's rocked your world, causing the ground to shift beneath your feet. The world as you knew it no longer exists because the person you loved is no longer here in this physical life. At times you wonder how you will go on, and yet you do. You are stronger than you thought and sometimes stronger than you want to be. How do you make sense of all that has happened?

Dealing with grief is a bewildering process. You experience a confusion of emotions. At times you feel hopeful, at times you're in despair. And that's all normal.

I remember feeling desolate as my 59 year old father lay in the hospital dying 30 years ago. I was amazed that the world kept on turning in spite of my sorrow. I wondered how I could make sense of this and how I could possibly heal.

Working through grief is different for everyone but some of the emotions that we experience are described in an ancient song of the Old Testament, Psalm 30.

Even if you are not religious, I invite you to listen to some of the verses of this song, which express the real pain we experience in life. I'm going to read sections of it interspersed with some commentary. As we read through it, let's think about the process of grief and recovery.

Psalm 30

The psalm begins with a summary. The writer says he has triumphed over his pain and gives God the credit.

¹ I will exalt you, LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. ² LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. ³ You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit.

⁴ Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. ⁵ For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

Then the writer recounts his story, recalling how once he felt untroubled. There was a time that he felt invincible, but then trouble hit and he didn't know what to do.

⁶ When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." ⁷ LORD, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.

⁸ To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy:

⁹ "What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?"

¹⁰ Hear, LORD, and be merciful to me; LORD, be my help."

The writer is in the pits of despair, wondering why God allowed this to happen. We can certainly relate to the despair and desperation of the plaintiff.

But then, suddenly, the writer proclaims that he is healed!

¹¹ You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my [mourning clothes of ashes and] sackcloth and clothed me with joy, ¹² that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

How should we interpret this sudden shift in outlook? How does someone turn from wailing to dancing? It's not an overnight process, it's an ongoing process of learning to live with loss. When someone dies, we don't stop missing them, but we learn to live with the grief. We adapt, grow, and change in order to flourish in life. We incorporate the best of what we have learned into our lives. We honor our loved one by living in ways that celebrate and commemorate our loved ones and what they stood for.

Walter Bruggeman, a religious scholar who spent his career studying the Old Testament, says that the psalms give us words to describe the ongoing process in our lives of Orientation, Disorientation, and Re-orientation.

When we are oriented, it feels like all is right with the world. We feel comfortable, like we understand how the world works and where we belong in it. Our relationships are familiar and comfortable.

Then comes the storm, the disorientation. Suddenly our world shifts and nothing is the same. Our very being feels threatened. We lose the people or things that made us feel safe and secure. We don't know who we are or where the world is going anymore. Nothing makes sense. We cry out for help to whoever or whatever will listen. Where will our help come from? We feel angry, afraid, confused, sad. We no longer have what we once valued. How are we to go on?

We flail and flounder around in this mess, this pit. We tell our story over and over to others and ourselves. Gradually, some of our pain eases, and we start to find our feet again. We begin to make some sense of this new reality. We learn how to function in this new world. It will never be like it was, but it can be good. We can find some way to understand it and to work with it rather than denying this new reality. Maybe we learn something about life or about ourselves. Maybe we remember something about the person we lost that gives us purpose and strength to go on.

We are emerging from the pit and becoming re-oriented. Oh, we will have times that we fall into the pit again, cry and wail, or wallow there. But that happens less often and for shorter periods of time as our healing continues. Gradually we find that we can experience joy once more, at least for fleeting periods of time. And we discover that we are finding ways to cope with the emptiness left by our loved one's absence.

How do we heal? It's different for everyone but we know there are some things that help.

Look to your spirituality. Whatever sources of strength you find, lean into them. Spend more time in nature, in prayer, with spiritual guides, with supportive friends, or in journaling.

Be gentle and compassionate with yourself, understanding that you are wounded but healing.

Tell your story and the story of your loved one. As you reflect on who they were, what was important to them, their values and the legacy they left, you will discover the meaning of their lives and how you can honor their memory. Celebrate their lives and incorporate what you learned from them into your own life.

Maybe you will plant a garden, tell stories to your grandchildren, make a donation to charity in their honor, or become a better friend to someone. You can make choices to honor and carry on your loved one's memory.

It's hard work. But it can be done. I want to leave you with an image, a symbol, that may inspire you as you do this work.

Are you familiar with the lotus flower? It's common in Asia but less often seen here. It's a water lily. This beautiful flower grows in muddy water. With its roots in the soil, it pushes up through muddy water to produce a gorgeous bloom that adds color and beauty to the area. And every night, the flower closes and disappears into the muddy water. It sinks below the surface, but the next day it reappears, beautiful and pristine.

Buddhist and Hindu traditions revere the lotus flower as a symbol of resurrection, renewal, and rebirth.

Like the lotus flower, you are growing and pushing through troubled waters to reach the sun and surface. You shine with life and vitality, even after suffering pain and disappointment. Day after day, you show up, representing your best and the best of your loved one, creating beauty and joy in a difficult world. You may be the hope and inspiration in someone else's life.

Maybe right now, you just need to know that it's possible to live in joy once again.

Please remember that the staff of HoriSun is here to help you through the process. We are happy to talk to you about the changes in your life and walk with you through your grief journey.

May you find joy and healing in your life. With love, I pray that you will grow and adapt in this new reality and find renewed meaning and peace. May you be blessed.

Thank you.