

Carol's reflection – Feb 27 2022

I wanted to talk about hope today.

When I was writing the words for the beginning of our weekly worship mailing I was thinking about the hope that comes with spring.

I thought today I could talk about the hope that comes in the Gospel, the story of the transfiguration of Jesus.

But today, it is impossible to speak about any of that, without beginning with our grief.

What grief we have. The pandemic continues and every day we hear of more people who are sick, more people who die from COVID or from anything else and COVID's presence in our world means that people cannot visit in hospitals as they would like to – safety regulations are a priority, even when it means that families are separated.

What grief we have. The Emergency Measures Act is now rescinded, but the fact that the Government needed to use it to end protests on Parliament Hill, in other cities and at border crossings is almost unfathomable.

What grief we have. The climate crisis is all around us. In Winnipeg we see the snow and worry about the spring and floods. We see drought developing west of us. We know of storms throughout the world that bring astounding damage to people and property.

What grief we have. We awoke on Thursday to the news that Russia had begun the invasion of Ukraine that we feared. A diplomatic solution was not found. World leaders joined together to condemn Russia's actions, but the bombs continued to fly. Innocent people are killed, injured and terrorized. Some of us have family and friends in Ukraine, and all of us weep.

What grief we have.

There are not any words that make grief go away. Grief is not something that we 'get over'. Grief is something that becomes a part of us. It shapes us. It impacts our thoughts and our decisions.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes it talks about a time for everything – a season for everything.

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;...

In thinking about those words we are to understand that in all that happens in life, God is with us. And, there is a fullness to life that includes some pretty awful things. This Russian invasion of Ukraine is a particularly awful thing.

*...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.*

Knowing all these things though, we are praying for peace.

Next week we will read the Gospel story of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Oh how that resonates with us today as we weep over Kiev, and all of Ukraine.

And perhaps we should also think about Paul's words to the church at Rome:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38-39)*

Nothing separates us from the love of God.

Grief cannot separate us. We are in God's love.

In the artistic rendering of the Gospel reading in the St. John's Bible, the artists depict Jesus with a face whose features are almost indistinguishable in brightness, except for his eyes which reach out to us.

And, in the artistic collaboration between Donald Jackson and Aidan Hart, Jesus's clothing is changed too. His clothes are not only changed in colour but in shape – to a much more priestly robe that indicates the Glory of God. And, what should be on that robe? Dazzling gold covered in white crosses that will also be the first illustration in the Gospel of John -- in the beginning was the Word. It is not a single cross on Jesus' robe, but many, many crosses, symbolizing all the hurts and burdens of the this world – and all of them on the robe of the Christ – when the Glory of God is clearly revealed.

Jesus is changed in this moment. God's glory is revealed. And the word of God comes from the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

But, as the Gospel continues, we know that God is with Jesus through all the seasons, through all the times. It is not a life without struggle that we are given, it is a life with God.

God's love shapes us. Grief shapes us. Love shapes us. And each of the experiences of life can shape us to care for others, to live in grace, to be intentional about our decisions and our actions.

And when we know that nothing can ever separate from the love of God, then we can live with hope. Hope – not as a platitude that life will only be good, but God's hope. Hope for a world of peace and justice. Hope for an end to hunger. Hope for an end to war.

Hope...

(that) sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

Let us be people of hope in this time of grief.

Have mercy, O God.
Amen.