

I don't like the feeling of grief. I'd much rather move on and think about positive things. Yet there is much to grieve. On a personal level I am still grieving the loss of Dr. Jean, and the loss of a close friendship that suddenly changed its form a year ago; on a societal level I grieve the inhumane treatment of immigrants in our cities and on our borders, and on the macro-level, I grieve the cruelty and loss of human life in conflicts in so many places, and the great extinction happening for the creatures of the world.

I'm sure you can add to my list.

In the first reading this morning we heard David's grief in his eulogy for Saul and Jonathan. While David had been battling the Amalekites, Saul led a battle against the Philistines. The Philistines were stronger and soon had them surrounded. Saul's sons were all killed, and Saul fell upon his own sword rather than risk being captured alive.

So David returned from a successful campaign to find Saul and his sons dead. Today's reading was the "Song of the Bow", David's lamentation over the death of the king and his son, David's dear friend Jonathan.

In the past three decades, gay and lesbian people have created a place for themselves within Christianity by challenging prejudice and challenging the few Biblical verses which can be read to say that same-gender relationships are sinful. And just as feminists have raised up the women in the Scriptures, noticing for example that Jesus included Jairus' wife when he healed his daughter in today's Gospel reading, just as feminists have raised up the women of the Bible so too gay and lesbian people have looked for stories of same-gender relationship which may have been glossed over by hetero-normative readings.

The relationship between David and Jonathan is one of the two great same-gender friendships in the Scriptures, the other being Ruth and

Naomi. As David said, “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.”

David and Jonathan were not “gay” in the way that we understand it today. There was no culturally understood or even possible same-sex partnership in the way that has developed in our day. In fact, David had two wives who shortly before this had been abducted by an Amalekite raiding party but, hero as he was, he had chased after them and reclaimed his wives, unharmed. It is however quite possible that their very close friendship had a sexual component.

This is important for gay people because it is important that we see ourselves included in the Scriptures. For thousands of years the Biblical scholars and commentators in the west have been privileged white men based in universities and monasteries. In recent decades, people who have been in some way marginalized by society have claimed their own place in the Biblical narrative and in the continuing revelation of God’s Word at work in the world. Liberation theologians have raised up the oppressed people of Central and South America, noting God’s particular support of the poor and down trodden, feminists have drawn our attention to the importance of the, often un-named women, and queer theology has gone beyond looking for stories of same-gender relationship to question the binary understanding of two discreet genders.

But let us return to David and his grief.

Grief is an important part of the human experience, and as we age there are more occasions for grief as more loss occurs in our lives and relationships. There are many psalms, like today’s, which express the sorrow and grief that often occurs for us.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice!  
O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading. (Ps.  
130:1)

Grief happens when bonds of connection are broken. We are relational people and our bonds with others are very important to us. We also grieve when things change in which we have invested our time and our energy. For some of us each grief builds upon a previous one until it can feel as though we are living under a cascade of sadness.

That can be avoided. At some point in the grief process we get to accept that what has gone has gone, what has changed has changed and we cannot bring them back. It is not disloyal to move on. We can best honor those who have gone and those parts of our lives which were once so important to us by allowing ourselves to grieve and then when the time is right, connecting again to new hopes and new possibilities.

The first verse of the next chapter tells us that “In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The LORD said “Go up.” (2 Sam. 2.1), David went to Hebron and there he was anointed king. It was in the course of time that David was ready to move on. In his grief there came a point when it was the right time and so he prayed, “What now?”

Even the psalms of deepest despair never leave us in despair. There is always a point when the psalmist turns to God. Today we said in Psalm 130,

My soul is longing for the Lord more than those who watch for daybreak.

(Let the watchers count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.)

We can count on daybreak and the Lord.

I think that is very important for us today. As we grieve for the seabirds who are dying because of plastic in the oceans, as we grieve for lost friends and loved ones, as we grieve for lost abilities and opportunities, as we grieve for the suffering caused by our own inhumanity, we can count on daybreak and the Lord.

So let us not be fearful of loss. It is part of loving, it is part of living with zest and joy. It is easy especially for older people to stop forming new and new connections because they take energy and they carry with them the possibility of more loss. But research has proved again and again that meaningful connections with other people keep us healthier and living longer. Relationship is important to us however old we get, which is why we encourage each other to visit those who are not easily able to come here to join with us.

I am grateful for this faith community and for our ability to celebrate many different kinds of relationship and to acknowledge many different kinds of grief. Next Sunday will be the Gay Pride day in Mission Plaza and I hope that many of you will participate in the Episcopal booth as a witness that God's love encompasses all people and that we support healthy relationships of all kinds, even as we hold gently the awareness that joyful relationship carries the seed of grief within it.

Berkeley Johnson has recently been trained in helping those who grieve not the death of a loved one but the myriad other things that cause us grief, the end of a career, the end of a marriage, the loss of physical ability. If you are interested in a time limited support group around such

issues he would be glad to hear from you.

Yes there is grief. But we can count on daybreak and the Lord. Grief holds within it the seed of new joy. We are a resurrection people. At the heart of our sacred narrative is the deep grief of the death of Jesus – the death of all that seemed hopeful and joyous and possible. But out of that death, God brought a new creation. A new creation which is growing in and among us.

We can count on daybreak.