

3rd Sunday of Advent – “Love”

“Grief and Love: A Blue Christmas Reflection”

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Elvis sang, “I’ll have a blue Christmas without you.” For many of us, this Christmas, perhaps more than any other, will feel particularly blue. For some of us, it will be the first holiday without a loved one. Their death will leave a gaping hole in our hearts as well. Many of the traditions we have loved will also be much different with their absence. Add the December darkness, and our feeling “blue” in heart, mind and spirit is understandable.

This year with the pandemic, and our consideration of the health and safety of our family, friends and community, many of our holiday traditions, parties and events have been cancelled. Couple these losses with the death of loved, and this may be the bluest of blue Christmases.

In his book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*, Francis Weller, writes: **“Grief and love are sisters, woven together from the beginning. Their kinship reminds us that there is no love that does not contain loss and no loss that is not a reminder of the love we carry for what we once held close.”**

While love and grief are woven together like sisters, accompanying us throughout all our days, we are also mindful of the other emotions that come when our lives are impacted by the death of someone we have loved and the loss of a job, a relationship, a trip, changes in how we work and attend school, and worship.

Grief in its many forms has become a companion as we try the best we can to adjust to our new normal way of pandemic life, hoping against hope that the vaccine, mask wearing, washing hands, safe distance will soon allow us to re-gather.

I wonder if this is how the people of Israel were feeling in their exile that prevented them from gathering with as they had traditionally done for worship and activities, creating a sense of deep grief and lament.

It was into this deep despair, that the Prophet Isaiah holds out hope that God has not forgotten them. That a new day will dawn, and their mourning will be turned into gladness.

This morning, we are lighting four special candles of remembrance for what we have loss over this past year. While we remember our loved ones who have died, and the many other deaths we have experienced, we cling to the flickering light which reminds us of the promise of Emmanuel, "God-with-Us".

I do not believe we ever get over the death of a loved one and we will be forever changed by this pandemic. Grief is now a constant companion and so is Love. Death and loss do not have the final say. Love does, and we believe that nothing in life or in death including this pandemic can separate us from the love of God who abides in us even in our grief, tears, and sorrow.

Amen.

I will be inviting you to participate by having a candle at home to light and if you feel comfortable, sharing in the comments section. As we prepare, I offer you these words by Jan Richardson, from her book "The Cure for Our Sorrow". It is a "Blessing for the Longest Night":

All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.
It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.
So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you

even though you cannot
see it coming.
You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.
This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.
So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.
This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.
—Jan Richardson
from *The Cure for Sorrow*