



Pain & Compassion

FROM NAYIRI KARJIAN ASSOCIATION GENERAL MINISTER | MAY 21, 2020

The pain is too much, the injustices too stark, the heartaches too deep. What are we to do?

The word *pain* from the Old French *peine*, Latin *poena* and Greek *poine* shares the same root as the word *punishment*, *penalty*, *penance*. Is that why since ancient times pain has been connected with punishment, that you did something to deserve it?

If you ever thought that pain is deserved COVID 19, Job's story, not to mention Jesus', will challenge you. In our world where the understanding of deserving, reward and punishment, run our lives, where binary and dualistic thought polarizes not only people but the way we see the world, it is difficult to hold on to a faith perspective that calls us to see the world through the eyes of grace, love and wholeness.

Our biblical ancestors thought that God was responsible for everything, good, bad and in-between. They believed that God ran the world, held it in God's hands, and nothing happened outside of God's will.

I believe we can learn from them. They were able to accept pain and not see it as a threat to God's love and goodness. They believed that God was always and forever in charge, and they were not. And, that God transcended pain. They did not see pain negating God's love and goodness. They accepted that no one promised them a life free of pain. This perspective helped them adapt, adjust to things they could not change, and trust that since it is all in God's hands, all will be well.

Many of us who experience God as LOVE know that God does not inflict pain and that in this LOVE we experience mercy instead of deserving, gift instead of

merit, blessing instead of score-keeping, grace instead of reward or punishment. God does not cause pain. God hurts when we hurt. Such is LOVE.

Pain is not a rational reality. Pain cannot be explained or made into something logical or sensible. Attempts to explain it fall short. Pain just is. It can only be experienced, lived and eventually healed. The way to healing is only through it.

So what do we do with pain? We share it because shared pain is easier to bear and to heal. We lament and weep because weeping can bring about healing. We receive it, walk through it, live with it, lean from it, and emerge from it more loving and more compassionate. Show me a compassionate person and I know that they have walked through the valley of pain, sorrow and heartbreak.

Or, we can pretend pain does not exist, ignore and neglect it, or fight it, and remaining stuck in it we become bitter and cruel, causing the same pain to all in our path.

Pain is a tough way to grow in compassion. But I have not experienced any other, more "effective" way of learning compassion, co-passioning and co-paining. It seems we have to hurt in order to understand another's hurt - how to stand in another's shoes, how to grow in understanding and kindness, and how to practice grace and generosity of spirit. I do wish there was another way, but alas I have not found it.

Pain is tough but we can salvage it, give it meaning by learning and growing through it to be a more compassionate people, just like Jesus. Be compassionate. Wear your facemasks.