

## Joy Comes in the Mourning

*"Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:6)*

In a phone conversation last week, a priest colleague told me that he'd been sent the latest edition of *O Magazine*. A cover article was entitled, "Joy Comes in the Mourning." That title wasn't an accidental misspelling, but an intentional play on the words of the psalm. I was intrigued and began to wonder, what do joy and mourning have to do with each other? How might there be joy in the mourning of this time of pandemic loss and grief?

As we Episcopalians often do, I turned to the Book of Common Prayer. The notes at the end of the Burial Office say this: "The liturgy for the dead is an Easter liturgy. It finds its meaning in the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we too shall be raised. The liturgy, therefore, is characterized by joy . . . This joy, however, does not make human grief unchristian. The very love we have for each other in Christ brings deep sorrow when we are parted by death." Rejoicing and weeping go hand in hand in times of loss. Joy and mourning are connected.

We have been in a long, long Holy Saturday, like the time between death and resurrection when the women who prepared the spices could do nothing but wait, when the men who ran away in fear could do nothing but hide, when all were in deep grief. We believe in the resurrection. We believe that Easter comes, and yet the grief we experience over all that we have lost, all that we cannot do, all that we miss, can threaten to overwhelm us. On top of that, we will celebrate the wonder of Advent and the joy of Christmas this year in the limbo of Holy Saturday. Not being together on Easter Day was hard. Adding Christmas on top of it is hard. Our grief in this in-between-time of waiting and uncertainty is hard.

So, how can joy come in the mourning? How can we celebrate and grieve, both at once? We can do it by remembering that joy does come in the morning. Easter follows Holy Saturday. This pandemic will not last forever; it will end. We will gather again in person. We will hug each other and sing together and share the Eucharist in community. We can find hope knowing that an end to these particular sorrows will come.

We can know joy in the mourning by looking out for the ways that God is working in and through and among us. God has not abandoned us to this wilderness of COVID time, but is present with us. God is feeding hungry people, healing old wounds, empowering us to learn new skills and teaching us to go deeper in relationships with those we love, with creation and with our deepest, truest selves.

We can know joy in the mourning by reaching out to others. Cooking or delivering meals, shopping for a neighbor, making phone calls to those who are lonely, writing notes of encouragement, volunteering at the polls -- activities like these are ways to step outside of our mourning and into the joy of using what God has given us for the sake of others.

We can know joy in the mourning by getting outside, as we are able, and experiencing the wonders of God's creation. Seeing the colors of the autumn leaves, watching birds at the feeder (and squirrels, too), plunging our hands into the dirt, noticing subtle differences as the seasons change -- these simple celebrations of creation bring joy. We can experience the joy of God's creation inside, too, in the presence of our pets, the plants we tend and the flowers we arrange, in the kitchen as we cook fresh foods and in the dining room as we eat them.

Seeing others and calling them by name, even from a needed physical distance, brings joy. I notice on Zoom calls that when one person speaks then calls another by name and invites them to speak, that person smiles. Being seen, being recognized, being called by name lifts us and carries us closer to joy. Anything we can do to recognize and speak the names of others brings joy in the mourning.

As we continue to live this long Holy Saturday of sorrow, uncertainty and longing, may we keep our eyes and hearts open to joy. May we always be ready to embrace the wonder of resurrection and to receive God's gift of joy each time it is offered. Joy comes in the morning. Joy comes in the mourning.

Bishop Susan+