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Is Your Heart Troubled?

John 14:1-7

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?^[b] ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going."^[c] ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know^[d] my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

We lost 5 people in the congregation in the first few months of this year. On February 11th, we lost ***CHARITY Mensah after a cancer battle***. At age 66. ***She was also an immigrant from Ghana***, so the celebration of her life that we held on March 28th was full of Ghanaian traditions.

It started with a viewing, then a funeral, then hours of a special reception—which included lots of music, dancing, traditional food and gifts.

Our Fellowship HALL was transformed by her friends and family into something traditional to her culture, everything decorated in red and black (signifying someone who died too soon). They served traditional dishes, and the center of the room was open for dancing.

I sat with her family at the RECEPTION, next to her cousin Kofi, who graciously explained to me the different Ghanaian traditions, including how the service here at the church was very SHORT! Funerals in Ghana are 3 to 7 days long, involving the whole village! He also explained the singing and dancing, what we were eating, and what the different activities meant.

It was a long day, but so wonderful to be a part of something so BEAUTIFUL AND DIFFERENT.

Charity's best friend, Elsie, was gracious enough to help me navigate the service, and work with the family to make it meaningful for all.

It reminded me that GRIEF IN AMERICA is very different---

We usually don't let people grieve very long.

We expect that after the funeral, people should get back to life, and move on.

We use crazy words like '*finding closure*'.

We bring lots of food to grieving families,

But soon that ends and we expect people to return to normal—

even though ***we NEVER really get over a loss, do we?***

I don't think so.

Employers give maybe 3 days of bereavement.

Churches support people, for awhile.

But soon—friends get ***uncomfortable*** around those who are still grieving.

Some denominations are different.

Eastern Orthodox have 40-day periods of mourning,

As do some Roman Catholics.

But in general, American grief is ***SHORT***.

We could learn from other FAITHS.

Jewish families often sit Shiva for 7 days after the burial,

Some observe another 30 days of less intense mourning,

but still a time of grief.

Muslim traditions have an immediate burial as well,

followed by a period of mourning, usually three days.

But for widows, the traditional time of mourning is 4 months and 10 days.

In this country, we also SEPARATE ourselves from seeing death.

Many do not have a viewing, or a burial, or those might be private.

Years ago, bodies were brought to a table in the home,

but now all of that is handled by a funeral home.

I have met many adults who have never seen a deceased person's body.

Hospitals even remove them right away from patient rooms.

What does all this do to OUR GRIEF?

It means that it is often ***stifled***.

It might be stuffed, deep down inside, only to come out in other ways—

like depression, or addiction, or broken relationships.

It also means that many people DON'T KNOW how to handle someone who is grieving.

We want to be there, and show love and support—
So we come to the funeral, we bring food and cards.
But we might be completely uncomfortable
hearing about someone's grief—***unsure of what to do or say, especially*** days, weeks, or months later.

Similarly, we find ourselves uncomfortable with OTHER LOSSES--

Like the loss of a job, a dream, a marriage,
Or the loss of health—all different forms of grief.

What does this have to do with John 14?

Well, Jesus is speaking these words at the Last Supper,
On his last night with the disciples.
In a way, ***he is already grieving***—knowing that he will go to the cross.
And he is trying to prepare them for that grief,
But they are confused.

Do not let your hearts be troubled...believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house, are many rooms, Jesus says.

What is he talking about, they wonder?

Why should our hearts be troubled—other than by your words, about suffering?
We do believe in you!

And what do you mean rooms in your Father's House?

Where is this place,
And why do we need to know that you will take us there—
because you are going there?
How would we know the way to get there?

This is why Thomas says:

“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Which is when Jesus shares a famous verse:

I am the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE.

These verses are incredibly FAMILIAR to people in churches,

And even those marginally involved.

When do we hear these words? Often at funerals, right?

Because we are sharing the hope of eternal life,

And going to be with Jesus in heaven.
Makes sense.

But what if that's only ONE ASPECT of this passage?

Yes—Jesus is going to die on the cross and ascend to the Father in heaven.
And yes, he promises eternal life with him, to those who believe in him.

But is this just a passage about 'SECURING OUR SPOT' in heaven?

Would that really make sense given the ministry, life and death of Jesus?
What if these are actually words of **HOPE**—to those who will soon grieve.
What if these are words of **PROMISE**—to all who suffer loss,
And who can rely upon the power and presence of *Jesus himself*?

Jesus doesn't say—you'll get a ticket to heaven with me!

He says he's going to **prepare a place** for us,
and **will take us** to be with him there.
What does that mean?

Well, what if the deepest meaning is that JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH US,

That Jesus **wants to be** with us,
Even in our grief and loss?
Especially so.

And what about that famous verse: I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Is that just a note about how **you've got to be a Christian to get to heaven**?
Would that make sense, given the fact that Jesus says in John 3,
that he came for the whole world, to save and not to condemn the world?
What if there's a **DEEPER MEANING here too**?
That would certainly make sense in John's gospel,
A book that always has layers of meaning.

What if Jesus is saying something PROFOUND, & SIMPLE?

What if he is **drawing us to himself**—as the best way to handle grief?
What if he's sharing the truth about who God is, and God's love for us?
What if he's letting us know about new and resurrected life, even after grief?

These are the deathbed words of Jesus.

The one they've been following for three years.
It makes sense that these are **powerful and profound words**.

Sometimes we take scripture and see only one dimension,
Or only the dimension we want to see.

What should we LEARN from John 14?

Well, what if we could find *assurance, that Jesus is with us,*
in every kind of grief?

What if we could find help, *in supporting others* who grieve?

So often we MEAN WELL when someone is grieving,

And we DON'T THINK about our words, or actions.

We say, ***CALL ME if you need anything.***

When instead we could say something like:

I'll bring dinner Thursday, or

I'll pick up the kids and take them to a movie.

A pizza is being delivered to you,

A gift card is coming to you for a delivery of groceries,

Someone will be there at 10am to clean your house.

Which is more helpful and meaningful to someone grieving—

No matter what the loss?

Definitely something needed, something concrete,
something that says *I'm in this with you.*

We say to a couple who have miscarried—

at least you can have another baby,

When instead we could say:

I can't imagine your pain.

We say to a parent who's lost a child—

well, maybe God needed another angel in heaven,

Or to a child who's lost a parent—

well, at least they are in a better place.

When instead we could say:

I'm so sorry.

It's unimaginable.

There are no words.

Or better yet...when someone is grieving and struggling,
We could do the BEST THING of all—

We can just *show up*.

Hold their *hand*.

Offer a *hug*.

Cry with them.

Don't say a word.

Be *present*.

*We often say things and do things
 to make OURSELVES feel more comfortable around a grieving person,
 And in the process, we might do more harm than good!
 Even without meaning it!*

Because saying things like,
*Everything happens for a reason,
 Or God knows what He's doing,
 Or she's an angel in heaven,
 Or he lived such a good long life*

These all can have the effect of *causing MORE PAIN and questioning—*
 because they can *discount someone's pain,*
 Even make them feel *guilty for grieving,*
 Or *more angry* with God,
 Or *confused* about why they feel so bad!

*I mean, think about what might go through YOUR mind
 on the other side of such comments...*
God needed MY child? What about her life here, with me?
A good long life? Does that mean we don't miss older people who die?
How many years is enough?
Everything happens for a reason? Are you sure?
What kind of God takes people in car accidents with drunk drivers?
I guess I could have another child, but I wanted this one!

Sometimes comments like these have lifetime effects...
 My Grandma never got over the hospital chaplain saying Grandpa was in a better
 place, and God does everything for a reason.
 I've talked to countless people who have left church because of harm,
 Experienced while grieving.

***On the last night of his life, Jesus continued to TEACH his disciples,
But most of all, he shared his LOVE,***

He gave them the ***best gift of all*** for troubled hearts—HIMSELF.
He took ***bread*** and broke it, saying this is my body, broken for you.
He took ***wine*** and poured it, saying this is the new covenant,
sealed in my blood, for you.

***He knew they were all about to suffer,
and he chose to SPEND TIME with them,***

Demonstrating his love.

Offering his power and presence.

Not once did he say, it won't hurt you, or ***Don't grieve too long.***

***I mean, Jesus knew what awaited him,
And he tearfully asked God to take the cup away from him!***

No one wants to grieve.

But when we do, God is the one who is ***ALWAYS WITH US.***

And Jesus is the one who offers us ***COMFORT and presence.***

Later in this chapter, Jesus again says that he is going away, but sending his Spirit,
then he says:

Peace I leave with you; MY PEACE I give to you.

I do not give as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

It's that PEACE of Christ that we all need so desperately in times of grief—
Whether in death, or brokenness, loss of health, or relationships.

If you want WORDS to give to someone grieving,

Be cautious.

Try ***LISTENING more than talking.***

In the right moment, you could offer Jesus' words.

Or other words of comfort from the Bible, like

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says: ***"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."***

Psalm 23:4 says: *"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me"*

Isaiah 41:10 says: *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you;*

Matthew 11:28 says: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

But often, what we can and should give, ESPECIALLY AT FIRST,

Is what *Jesus gave* to his disciples.

The power of **PRESENCE**.

And **PRAYER**.

And **LOVE**.

Is YOUR HEART troubled today?

Most weeks we are ALL facing some kind of loss.

And I mean ALL of us.

We are not alone.

And what about the heart of someone YOU KNOW?

Is God asking you to reach out?

To be present with them?

The Good News of the Gospel is that JESUS IS WITH US.

In our own grief, and as we seek to comfort others—no matter what their loss.

And it doesn't matter how long grief lasts.

What matters is that ***God is with us,***

and we can enter into the grief of others.

And for that, all God's people can say together: Amen.