

Sermon: "Through the Tears"

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I remember sitting at the kitchen table for dinner with mom and dad when my mother said to my father "Annie can just keep going through her tears." It was the fall of 1969, and my Aunt Annie had lost her husband, my Uncle Andy, to acute Hepatitis a few weeks prior. He was only in his 40's, and he left not only Aunt Annie, but their three daughters: the oldest in nursing school, one in high school, and one only 9 years old. Aunt Annie had stopped in earlier in the day and had sat at the same kitchen table, talking to mom, still grieving of course. Mom said that even as tears streamed down Aunt Annie's face, she was able to continue the conversation uninterrupted and in a nearly normal voice. She kept going.

To me, a 12-year-old kid, mom's comments were upsetting because the profound sadness of Aunt Annie was a sort of wake up call for me about the terrible grief that would someday follow when one of my parents lost their lifelong companion. But I also had a sense of wonder that Aunt Annie was able to cry and function nearly normally at the same time. For both these reasons, I suppose, those moments at the kitchen table were etched permanently in my soul and I remember them even today as though they had just happened.

Maybe Aunt Annie had a special ability to carry on a conversation and cry at the same time. It certainly is not something most of us are able to do easily. But I am also convinced that it's no coincidence that Aunt Annie was a woman of great faith in God. And so I want to talk today about the role faith plays when we are facing great sorrow, or fear of the future, when it feels like everything has gone wrong, or when we just don't know how we will carry on.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the famed expert on death and grief, said this: "The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, *and have*

found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”

I certainly agree with that, and Kubler-Ross knows of what she speaks. After all, she defined the five stages of grief that many of us are familiar with. But what she doesn't tell us is HOW we can find our way out of the depths. Like so many personal challenges we need to solve, the answer to how we can find our way out of the depths is in the Holy Bible. Let's explore three simple truths that are the foundation of the kind of faith that we need when we are in the depths.

First, from Psalm 34: *The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart*

God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at the same time. He doesn't go away from us, ever. If we acknowledge that in faith, we know we can always ask for His help. There is never a time when we are helpless!

Second, from 1 John 5: *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.* And from James 1: *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*

God is not only near to us when we need Him, He will always hear our plea if we ask with the confidence that faith brings. We must believe and if we do, He will hear us.

Third, from Hebrews 4: *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

You see, it all comes together. If we have that confidence—the faith that God is near, that he is listening—and with that confidence we approach Him with our cry for help, He will show mercy on us. He will shower us with His grace, the grace that will pull us out of the depths.

About 53 years ago, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King was taken from us on the balcony of a motel in Memphis. The nation was already stressed from a years-long wave of dramatic social change. We were mired in a conflict that did not have the support of many Americans, and yet our brave soldiers served valiantly, and sadly, many did not come home. When Dr. King, a man who preached for an end to injustice and inequality, who led through peaceful protest, was killed, the nation fell into the depths. Without his voice of reason calling for the peaceful advancement of the cause, chaos prevailed in the days following his death.

King said "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." His message of love and the light of Christ was lost and forgotten in those dark days of 1968.

Today, our days are dark again. It seems our nation has lost its way and chaos has reared its hateful head. We need light. We need love. The light and love of Jesus Christ are the things that will pull us from the depths. We cannot hate. We cannot allow darkness to prevail. And as Reverend Holt said last week, it starts with us.

Covid continues to plague us. Sickness and death surround us. But there is light at the end of this tunnel. A new day will dawn. In the meantime, we must keep ourselves out of the depths of despair. How? Remember what the scriptures have taught us: God is always near. If we approach Him with faith, He will hear us. And He will show us mercy, and His grace will surround us like the warmth of the sun on a spring day.

Like my Aunt Annie, we can keep going through the tears. We can find peace through the tears. We can even find joy when it seems as if joy is a distant light that has been extinguished forever.

In a moment, Nancy will play a beautiful hymn for us, and the words speak to us today:

Precious Lord, take my hand,

Lead me on, let me stand.

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

Through the storm, through the night,

Lead me on to the light.

Take my hand, precious Lord,

Lead me home. Amen.

Let's pray the Lord's Prayer:

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE
DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR
TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US, AND LEAD US NOT INTO
TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE
GLORY, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN