

**Reflection for Tidings of Comfort**  
**Rosedale United Church , Dec 17 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. Anne Simmonds**

Oscar Wilde wrote: Where there is sorrow, there is holy ground.

I can't know what each of you is carrying in your heart as we enter this sacred space. I can imagine, because I am one of you and have also experienced the departure of Doug Norris, Karen Bowles, and now Wayne in the most painful of circumstances. In July we were all shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden death of Cory Copeland, our past clerk of session. Many long-time members are grieving the death of Bob Wallace and other elder members who have died or are no longer able to be in our midst because of infirmity. And there is the lingering loss and sadness from the upheaval in the spring of 2016.

Some of you are here to hold the space for personal losses – the death of a loved one, maybe even the painful loss of a relationship through divorce; the death of a beloved pet; the decline of physical health; a life-threatening diagnosis. All of these take us to the depths of the human condition. While loss and change are parts of the fabric of life, we are continually blindsided when they occur. It is real life, it is painful, and we are dragged kicking and screaming into the valley of the shadow of death.

Your grief says that you dared to love and now to love is to accept the rites of grief.<sup>1</sup>

Francis Weller writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Weller, Francis. *The wild edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred work of Grief*. North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California. 2015 page 25.

“We are laid low by grief. Grief punctures the solidarity of our world, shatters the certainty of familiar landscapes and known destinations. All these are shaken by unexpected loss. Grief feels like it will never pass. This brings us fear. We worry that our days will always be overcast, grey, and dulled by the sadness we carry. Fortunately, grief knows where to take us; we are on a pilgrimage to soul. It is challenging to honour this descent in a culture that values the ascent. People think they need to help us stay “up” – especially at the holiday season.”<sup>2</sup>

Our ritual this evening is a reminder that times of loss are inevitable and in a very real way necessary. If we are willing to engage the depths of the human condition, we can metabolize our suffering into something meaningful and ultimately sacred. Grief asks that we honour our losses, and in so doing, deepen our capacity for compassion.<sup>3</sup> Weller also writes; Grief has never been private; it has always been communal. Subconsciously, we are awaiting the presence of others, before we can feel safe enough to drop to our knees on the holy ground of sorrow.<sup>4</sup>

I want to speak for a moment about tears. In my extensive pastoral work with the dying and the bereaved, I notice that inevitably when people tear up or cry at these tender moments, they apologize for their tears. When I teach about this I say to the students “If my family are standing at my bedside when I am dying or at my funeral and not crying, I’m going to be really pissed off!” Seriously, tears cleanse and heal. They are to the soul what soap is to the hands.

“I know now that grief is a river running through the heart. I know that if I block the way, the water dams up, builds pressure, and spills over, making me sick or hostile or tired. Grief turns into joy when we get out of the way, let the river flow, and wait for the water to settle and clear. It’s that simple, and that difficult, and

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2. Ibid page 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Page 21.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid page 74

that magical,”<sup>5</sup>

This ritual is a container for your tears – and any other feelings that need to move in and through you. This is a time to attend to our broken hearts; to allow ourselves a measure of intimacy with grief; to allow the healing power of ritual and community to move in and through us. Grief work is soul work. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

I invite you in these moments to simply be with grief in whatever way you need to be in this time and place.

Inviting you to be present to what you are feeling in this service sounds simple, it's not, it's difficult. To help you – I invite you to take a moment to sit: to find a quiet place inside ...invitation to be with whatever is there In these moments – without trying or needing to change...

Grief shared is grief diminished. Grief is not forever, love is. May you find moments of comfort and peace as you journey through this holiday season. May you know, as did Mary through the voice of the angel, that the lord is with you.

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Lesser, *New American Spirituality*, page 306.