

I will wait for the Lord

Psalm 130; John 11: 1-45

It's very important for me to share something with you that I learned my second year of seminary. It is a phrase that I continue to use over and over in my head and in my ministry. You may feel like you are broken and "that is a very normal response to this abnormal situation."

I say this to people who are grieving. Even when it is an expected death of a loved one at ninety-nine years of age, there will be responses within you that feel strange. We use words like grief, mourning mostly. Sometimes though when death is unexpected or an experience is another kind of sudden and unexpected change, we call it trauma. It is the experience of remembering, deeply physically, mentally, and emotionally, that we are finite; we are vulnerable. This comes with pain of brokenness. Someone or something we love dies, changes, leaves. And you may be feeling or experiencing things that seem very odd and perhaps you are asking if you are broken. You are not. You are reacting *normally* to a very *abnormal* situation.

I think you can realize that a worldwide experience of an illness to the point of it being called a pandemic (as well is an experience that no one alive has experienced here in Canada) can be for some traumatic, and is for all grief-filled. Some Canadians have experienced this type of situation in small communities, or in their life journeys. But those of us living in Canada haven't been asked to stay home, quarantine, ration our time and our food since World War II (and even then we were least likely to be bombed, in the middle of Edmonton).

There have been pandemics before but not in living memory and of this magnitude. The last time Robertson-Wesley had to close its doors was the Spanish flu. The building was still being used. Our women volunteered their time and effort to clean linens for hospitals and others. It was full of steam and noise, but we were not able to gather in community to worship. None of us have a living memory of this type of experience. It is extraordinarily *abnormal*. You are now experiencing this. You may feel like your experience or emotions are doing it wrong or in a way that is broken. You are not. You are reacting *normally* to an *abnormal* situation.

There are many wise people who help us learn about this type of experience. Rev. Diane Strickland is a United Church minister who has gone into places after traumatic events to help people learn what was happening to them. She was in High River after the flood and Fort McMurray after the fire and she has some great wisdom for us.

The first thing to note is that what you are going through is something Jesus went through. Our story today tells a story of Jesus hearing that Lazarus was sick and doing nothing. He soon learns though that his slow arrival at Mary and Martha's caused them pain. When he gets there, he is distraught at seeing the grief. Jesus, who rarely makes mistakes, I believe, realized he had made a mistake.

He thought his glory and power was one of healing, raising the dead, making miracles happen. He'd forgotten that the miracle can be that someone is present to someone else- especially when they are going through something painful. Mary and Martha, yes, would have loved a miracle, but they also just wanted Jesus to sit with them and remind them of things they already knew.

God still loves you; we will never forget Lazarus; God is bigger than this pain you have, and God understands and weeps with you. Now Jesus was quick to weep as he realized what was needed. Yes, a miracle will come later, and the divine aspect of Jesus will be proclaimed again, but before that the humanity of Jesus needs to be shown. Jesus teaches us in times like these we will feel distraught, we will need to weep perhaps, either with actual tears or just within. We will need to be afraid, anxious, worried, and angry. These are feelings that are going to come ... Where have you been Jesus? Where have you been God? There is a *normal* question in this *abnormal* time.

Diane Strickland teaches us that we have within us gifts and strengths. We have minds that are creative and wondrous, hearts that are ready to love and be loved and we have bodies. Everybody is a little different. Some are good at dancing. Some are good at drawing. Some stay very still but emote love. Some are very active and emote energy. During times like these - both the time we are separated and when we begin to regain normal again - you will remain gifted but will have less.

You are still you - if you are a dancer you will still be a dancer. If you are a painter, a reader, a preacher; you still will be that, but you will have less of all of it. And that's because part of your God gifted mind is working. This was the image I had for my brain this week: part of it was always working out the new news. "Oh, okay that's the number, okay that's how I grocery shop, okay that's how I do a mail out." That takes a chunk of a mind-energy that I usually do not need to use to think about those things.

Same with my heart. The part of my heart that usually looks after myself, my family and those my community is very full. I need more of my heart to worry and wonder and hope and serve and give to those folk, which leaves less energy for the love I give the rest of the world.

And of course my body. I've not been having trouble going to sleep, but boy do I wake up early! I get to thinking, "today it will all be over" and it's not. So my body is trying to process all the changes and giving me less energy to do the regular things I need to do. I'm going to use an image for this. This is filled up (a small jug filled with water). This is the world. A bowl.

Normally we can put all our (water) body, heart and mind into there (bowl), but not now. You will have now a little bit to give, but less than normal. You will have a little bit more love, but not as much as a normal. And, you will have a little bit of energy, but not as much as normal.

You may be discouraged at how little or how much you are doing. You may be sad. A lot of the ways I care for people I can't do anymore, and I feel sad about that. I heard some beautiful voices on the phone this week, but I could not hold their hand. I didn't realize how essential that touch was to how I show care. I usually go for a long walk each day and this week I have gone for short walks. One day I even had to bribe myself; I can walk to the candy store and back.

This is a normal reaction. God has done this on purpose for you so that you do not give away too much. So that you will remember to forgive yourself. And on those days where you feel like the bride and groom at the wedding of Canaan and you didn't have enough wine. Or those days when you are Jesus and you think you can save the world and then you find out you got there four days too late to really help your friends. Or maybe you're like a little child at a picnic with Jesus and everyone is hungry and there's really no food and all you have is like your sandwich and a couple of fish that you caught and that's not going to cut it;

... yeah that's when The Holy Spirit comes because you are not just made of water, you are made of spirit and God is with you and overflowing and magical and mysteriously you will be enough.

(P.S. the water was actually vinegar so when I added the Holy Spirit (baking soda) the bowl runneth over!!)

You will be and you are enough. Amen.