



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Change: Living Between Memory and Hope Part 3: Beneath the surface- Loss”

John 20:1-18

Will Sparks November 10, 2013

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Nothing is ever just one thing. All our successes come with a price. Surrounding all our deepest joys are elements of wistfulness. Our sorrow is always a reflection of some love or other. Nothing is ever just one thing.

I have always been something of a political animal and so long before I moved to North Surrey, I had heard of this very interesting neck of the woods as a place of real political interest- a wonderful combination of left and right, business and community, rural and urban. And this area has produce dome characters, not the least of whom, the late Chuck Cadman. I was reminded of his story this week as I was thinking about my sermon. Chuck's life is a testament to the truth of the statement, nothing is ever just one thing.

Some of you probably know the story, and may have feelings about the late Member of Parliament for Surrey North. Our own Jim Karpoff ran against him in the 2004 federal election, and lost, much, I think, to Jim's relief. But regardless of all that, there is no mistaking the greatness required for Chuck and his wife Dona to withstand the grief of losing their son Jesse to a senseless act of youth violence. I was reading his story this week in an attempt to understand what it takes for a person to incorporate that kind of experience of loss, that kind of grief into life.

At the age of 16, Jesse was stabbed to death in a random street attack. Chuck, Dona and Jesse's sister Jodi were left to make sense of their loss. And there was nothing that could make sense out of it. However, their response was to create an organization called CRY- Crime, Responsibility and Youth. All of them became increasingly active in the community and indeed in the nation in an attempt to create a more just, safe and responsible world. Somehow their unspeakable grief was transformed and the energy of pain fuelled this activity.

We are in the middle of a 5 part series of sermons on the topic of change, "Living between Memory and Hope." We all handle change differently, but we all handle it. When something changes in our lives, we must find a way to adjust, to "take it in." And in the same way that our body metabolizes food, I believe our soul metabolizes the experiences of our life, we take in the change that we experience and somehow make it part of our life. Our soul works it through and it can become energy for other things in our life.

There has been a phrase saying around these days. You have heard people talk about resistance to change. Why do people resist change. Well, as the saying goes, people don't resist change. Thy resist loss. Every change includes loss. People are rarely unwilling to accept change if it has positive effect on their life. What we struggle with is when change includes significant loss. So today we move to the second major stumbling block as we metabolize the changes in our lives, loss.

According to the gospel of John, Mary Magdalin was the first disciple to discover that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb. There is no doubt that she was one of the central figures in Jesus' inner circle. So as she approached the tomb that morning her shoulders where thoroughly burdened with the grief of the previous few days. The loss of her teacher, mentor, dear friend was staggering. Life was just convulsing with loss. So when she discovered the body

gone, this was another in a long string of losses. There she sits, by the garden tomb, weeping. And through her tears she sees a figure. All she can think of is where the body might have Ben taken. The possibility of the resurrection is nowhere on her radar. But she sees him, through her tears. She sees the resurrected one through her grief and doesn't know it.

Isn't that the way. The possibility of life in the midst of our losses is so very hard to imagine, but it is there. And life that emerges from our losses is almost always first seen through tears. In fact resurrected life is always first seen through the tears of the grief of loss.

I believe that the resurrection Spirit of God hovers over and around our losses in the same way that she hovered over the waters of creation in the beginning, except this is a new beginning. The resurrection Spirit hovers around our losses reminding us how very precious life itself is, and how very precious our life is in particular. I can't tell you the number of times I have heard people say that through a loss they have re-discovered the people who really love them and how good it is to know that again and more deeply than ever. The preciousness of the life we live.

The resurrection Spirit of God hovers around our losses reminding us that this is our one wild and precious life and so we had better spend that one wild and precious life on the things that truly matter to us.

The resurrection Spirit of God hovers around our losses teaching us things that we can never learn in the good times, or at least more deeply and poignantly than we could ever learn then in the good times: things like endurance, compassion, courage, strength. And faith.

The resurrection spirit of God hovers around our losses with the power to turn garbage into gold (to borrow another Peter Short-ism), to turn our grief into strength, to turn our death into new life.

Talking to Grief

Ah, Grief, I should not treat you like a homeless dog
who comes to the back door
for a crust, for a meatless bone.
I should trust you.

I should coax you into the house and give you
your own corner, a worn mat to lie on, your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living under my porch.
You long for your real place to be readied before winter comes.

You need your name, your collar and tag.

You need the right to warn off intruders,
to consider my house your own
and me your person
and yourself my own dog.

• Denise Leverton

You see, loss and grief does not have to be our enemy. The grief that comes with life's losses, as painful as it is, is one of life's great teachers and we are wise to treat it with respect. It has an amazing power to help us metabolize the changes in our life, help us incorporate the losses into the new person that we are becoming, to deepen the soulfulness of our living. God is intimately at work in this, closer than we know, beneath the surface of things, showing us what else these losses will be in our one wild and precious life.

Amen