

“Memories & Legacies”

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Loss is something that binds us together, even when it makes us feel isolated. Everybody feels hurt sometimes. It is part of the human condition. We have that in common, and so we also have in common the power to keep each other company through our painful times.

Over the past several months, we have been hearing on the news about a lot of different kinds of loss. People lost homes in natural disasters. Others have been separated from their families because of unjust immigration policy. Some have lost loved ones due to violence. Hearing about these things, or having them happen in our own lives, might make us feel alone, sad, or even angry. It's OK to feel sad or angry or scared. Let's also remember that we are not alone, and that together we can help each other thrive. There are many ideas about how to help our country to get better at being fair, just, strong, and safe for everyone.

I have some experience sitting with families as they experience loss. I can tell you that, no matter how people might disagree about sports or politics or food, everyone who has to say goodbye to a loved one who died experiences grief. We might show our sadness, anger, and fear differently, according to personality or culture. We might have different ways of appreciating and showing gratitude for the one whose life touched ours. Yet we all grieve. We need one another. Even when the news is overwhelming, let's try to remember how to be together in the hour of our most profound life passages.

Human beings are united in the experience of loss. Yet, when we are in the thick of it, we don't always feel connected. The narrator in the story didn't want to do the things they normally did. They didn't want to watch TV or eat cookies. It was easy to get into an argument with a friend. Grief can make us distracted and irritable. Sadness can make us feel alone. We might even know in our minds that there are friends around us,

yet not be able to focus on any relationship other than the one that has been changed by death.

This is why we have rituals and sacred communities. This is why we organize people to drop off casseroles and to gather for memorial services. This is why we write our memories of the one who died in our sympathy cards, and why we listen when a grieving person wants to talk. When the grieving person is carrying a sadness so heavy that they can't also carry their sense of connection, the community has to carry that sense of connection for them, at least for a little while. We help them honor the loss, to acknowledge it as real and powerful. Then we stick by them. Little by little, one thing at a time, the grieving person will be ready to return to regular routines. It will feel awkward at first. We keep inviting them back into community, in their own time and in their own way. Change takes time. Like the seeds in the story, transformation is possible. We have a few extra packets of milkweed seeds at the back of the sanctuary, if you would like to take some home with you.

In our congregation, we have many ideas about what happens to someone's spirit after they die. Some of us believe our loved ones who died are in heaven. Some of us believe they are in the ground. Some of us believe that our souls live again in new bodies. In any case, we know that those we loved who died have made a difference to us. We have our memories. We can take time to appreciate the things they valued. We can remember that, even though living things die, love can live on.

Love is the greatest legacy. A legacy is something good that we create and that we hand off to the generations who follow us. A legacy is an idea or a resource or a heritage that we receive from a previous generation and that we carry forward, shaping it and growing it so that the best of the past meets the promise of the future. Something I often write in sympathy cards is, "May your memories bring you comfort. May the love they left as their legacy bring you peace."

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.