

JULY 2021

# CHURCH @ HOME

staying connected with God,  
each other, and ourselves

**INSIDE:**

MESSAGE  
FROM VI

SERMONS BY  
REV. NICK

SUBMISSIONS FROM  
OUR COMMUNITY

WALKING WITH GRIEF

## **Midsummer Greetings, Everyone!**

I hope this finds you well and able to enjoy some of the beautiful weather we have been having.

As I write this, I feel very blessed to be able to share with you that we have been able to spend time with three of our adult children, which feels truly remarkable, joyous and amazing all at the same time after not being able to see them since before the beginning of the pandemic.

I know many of you are in similar situations, yet many parts of the world still continue to suffer. I do hope you have been able to share together some physical family time once again.

I have also been reflecting on our post-pandemic world and what this will mean for our planet and the world we cohabit together. I would like to share with you some wise words I recently read, written by Richard Rohr:

*... continued*

*... continued from Page One*

*We begin a great adventure.*

*We begin something new.*

*The promise is upon us.*

*God will give us something new.*

*All we have is hunger.*

*...When we have new ears to hear with,*

*God can speak a new word to us.*

*...God now wants to speak something new to us.*

(excerpt from “The Great Themes of Scripture”)

This is Rohr’s prayer for us:

*Loving God, you fill all things with a fullness and hope that we can never comprehend. Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us to have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another. Listen to our hearts’ longings for the healing of our suffering world. We offer this prayer in all the holy names of God. Amen*

Our deep gratitude once again to all those who have contributed to this month’s magazine and care packages. Please keep your magazine submissions flowing in as they continue to inspire and be enjoyed.

Radiant blessings of summer,  
for good health and safe travels,

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# TWO SPIRITUALITIES

REV. NICK COATES

God be with you.

If you've been listening to me yammer on long enough, you know I always end up talking about how Jesus shows us to be human, about the kind of life he opens up for us:

This life of faith and spirituality,  
this life of being human,  
this life that embraces paradox and contradiction,  
this life that is big enough to hold the heights and depths of our humanity,  
this life of justice and peace-making,  
this life that ebbs and flows within the very Source of Life – this God of grace and love.

In one way or another, that's always what we'll end up exploring. We'll always end up talking about how everything is spiritual and that what we say and do matters.

But there's something else in there we need to talk about: this tension that exists underneath it all, this tension you may have felt as we do all that, this tension that arises as we explore the kind of life a gracious and loving God invites us to have.

And the tension is between what we'll call two spiritualities – between two approaches to what it means to be human and alive in this world.

## **the spirituality of doing vs. the spirituality of grace**

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On one side of this tension, pulling us this way, is the spirituality of doing . . .

this philosophy where having the right kind of life, being the right kind of human, being the kind of person God calls us to be, it's all about doing.

It's all about *going* to church, *getting* involved, *donating* resources, *going* to volunteer, *doing* right things, *saying* right things, *reading* and *praying*, and badabing badaboom, and through it all you find your life becomes deep and meaningful.

And on the other side, pulling us that way, we have the spirituality of grace . . .

It's all about knowing God is gracious and loving and will love me no matter what I do.

Anyone know what I'm talking about? Anyone been caught up in this tension before?

I'm sure we all have. It's a tension we will all experience throughout our lives: is life found by doing or is life found by being?

But here's the thing about those two spiritualities and the kind of life we're here looking for, that life we named at the beginning:

It doesn't work. They don't lead to each other.

One will simply leave us exhausted, tired and broken from trying to constantly be good, giving, gracious and loving people . . . while the other leaves us apathetic, disengaged and uninterested in anything other than the state of our own souls and spirits.

If the life Jesus opens up for us is one that cultivates both an interior *and* exterior life – doing things to create a just and expansive world *and* receiving God's grace and love – neither spirituality will get us there. They are too small and dualistic; whichever one we choose will leave us missing out on something.

So if the spirituality of Jesus isn't one of doing and it's not one of grace, then the question, of course, becomes: What is it?

Well, I wonder if we can begin to see a third option in this passage in the Bible.

The passage is from a part of a story called 'the Sermon on the Mount.' If you're ever curious as to just what exactly Jesus is all about, this is the best place to begin. It's this huge sermon where he talks about what God wants this world to look like and what it really means to be human and alive in this world.

And the part we hear is this section where Jesus is offering a new take on a bunch of social and religious norms:

We hear him talk about how something we shouldn't do is murder people, but then goes on to say: 'While that's true, you know what? Don't even be angry with someone.'

And we hear him talk about how another thing we shouldn't do is commit adultery, but then he goes on to say: 'While that's true, you know what? Don't even fantasize about it.'

And we hear him talk about how scripture teaches that if someone hurts you, you're allowed to hurt them back in equal measure, but then goes on to say: 'Actually, you know what, don't even seek revenge, don't try to get even. Do the surprising thing and respond with love.'

And we hear him talk about how it is taught that you should love your neighbours and hate your enemies, but then he goes on to say: "Actually, you know what? Forget that. Just love everyone."

And I think it's there, in that pattern of 'You've heard it said but now I tell you this,' that we can begin to see a third spirituality emerge . . . one that's not just about doing or one that's not just about grace, but the one Jesus is actually offering us, the one that can actually help us find and embrace that life we're looking for:

### **the spirituality of being.**

The spirituality of Christ, of Jesus, is one of being because when it comes to the good news, when it comes to the essence, heartbeat, and rhythm of it all, it *isn't* saying:

‘Hey! You all need to earn God’s love but good news, we’ve got a nice checklist to help you figure it out.’

And it’s not:

“Hey! You are all terrible people but good news, God’s gracious so don’t worry about it anymore.”

When it comes to the good news it's offering, it’s this:

“That thing you’re looking for? That Life, that Energy, that Spirit, that thing that will make you most human and most alive?! Good news, you were made with it. It’s already in you. It’s already with you. All you need to do is be you.”

**The spiritual task – the journey we’re all on – is to become more and more ourselves.**

The beautiful, liberating, and subversive thing Jesus is about is helping to connect us to who we truly are: people made with and for love.

And he does that by helping us go back to where it all begins and ends – not with a list of things to do, not with a get out of jail free card, but back to our hearts:

that place where God’s Spirit is said to live and move, back to that place that holds who we truly are, this place that shapes who we truly are.

So to you looking to tap into this life God opens up for us, to you looking to have a spirituality that hums with reverence, remember that.

Remember it's about being you, it's about being the divinely-inspired, grace-filled, loving person God made you to be.

*Amen*

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# THE RHYTHM OF REST

REV. NICK COATES

God be with you.

I don't need to tell you that it's been a hard and long year. While it's manifested in different ways, we've all felt it. We all know, deeply know, that it's been a tough year. Now, I don't know about you, but as we head into the summer, I'm feeling even more tired and cooked.

As we head into the summer, I find myself feeling it that much more. I mentioned this to my spiritual director. He took it in, sat back in his chair, sipped his coffee, and asked:

“Are you resting?”

“Yes,” I said. “I've got my routine going. I eat well. I exercise. I get outside. I relaxed this week. But despite all that, I'm still like . . . soulfully tired.”

And then he gave me one of those looks that only people like therapists and counsellors can give, and said, “*But Nick, you can be doing all that and not actually be resting.*”

Maybe he's got a point.

It makes me think of this story that's in the Bible where Jesus is out doing his thing and says:

*“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out?”*

*Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life.*

*I'll show you how to take a real rest.*

*Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.*

*Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.*

*I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.*

*Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”*







I mean, he's talking about us, isn't he? He's talking to those of us who know what it's like to feel existentially exhausted, this weariness that can come from just being alive.

Anyone know that feeling?

If you've rumbled with grief, anxiety, stress, obligation, duties, parenting, doubt, and despair, you know this feeling. If you're trying to find that balance between staying informed and engaged without going insane or apathetic, you know this feeling. If you're burdened down by the pressure of having to live by someone else's script, you know this feeling.

We know what it's like to be faint and parched, don't we? Especially after the 18 months we've just had.

I think that makes those words *that* much more beautiful because it says something really important about the faith and spirituality Jesus offers:

**It's big enough to hold our humanity.**

It doesn't try to ignore it, argue it all away, or promise an escape from it all, but it makes room for it all. It doesn't just speak to the heights of life, but also to its depths. It recognizes and embraces the fact that life can be a bit crap sometimes.

Which, in turn, says something pretty beautiful about God:

**that we have a Loving God who sees us and chooses to be with us and for us.**

Which, in turn, reminds us of the hope our faith and spirituality offers:

**Jesus isn't about bringing life after death, but life before death.**

It's not about some reward we get after we die anymore than it's about escaping our lived reality. It's about a way to live fully and wholly alive in the midst of our lived reality.

It's a life that's not free from pain, burden and hardship, but a life with enough grace and wisdom to struggle through them,

a life that's not hung up on the what ifs or the what could bes, but a life that's present and attentive,

a life that's not reading from someone else's script, but a life that is unmistakably yours,

a life that doesn't simply skim the surface of your existence, but plunges deep and soars high into what it means to be human and alive in this world.

It's a life deeply connected to and sustained by this God we've experienced, this Spirit that is this continuous and creative flow of love, grace, and mercy into the world, this reverent flow which holds it all together and drives it all forward.

Which brings me back to rest.

**What Jesus seems to be saying here is that the key to creating and sustaining this kind of life is the rhythm of rest.**

When we hear that word 'rest', what comes to mind?

For me, it's 'vacation.'

Maybe you've had this happen to you:

You go on vacation, where and for how long doesn't really matter, and the whole thing is designed to leave your burdens behind, to escape that which wears you down, and to unplug from all of life's distractions. But when it's all said and done, when you come back to the office or home, when you come back to reality, how do you feel?

Say it with me: "I feel . . . even more tired, worn out, and burned out than when I left."

We usually call it the post-vacation blues. I'm sure we've all experienced it.

And while I'm sure part of it is wishing we were still on vacation, I wonder if part of it is because we don't know how to really rest in the first place.

**We know how to escape and get away from it all, but we have no idea how to actually rest.**

What my spiritual director was pointing out was that, even though I was relaxing, I wasn't really resting.

When we talk about 'rest' we're talking about a very particular kind of rest, a kind of rest that is deeper and beyond just relaxing and that's essential and necessary to being fully and wholly alive.

As we begin to come out of this year we've had and as we begin to head into the summer which is, for a lot of us, this time of rest, maybe it's time to practice this kind of rest Jesus is talking about.

And so to help us into that, here are three things to remember about this rest we need to have:

**First: It's a resting in God.**

If part of how we understand what it means to be human is being connected to that Spirit which began it all and moves it forward, if part of what it means to be human, in other words, is to be a spiritual creature, then to rest is to open ourselves up to that which makes us truly alive.

Something pretty amazing happens when we stop to reconnect and rest in God:

we catch our breath; we remember we are loved, that we are enough, and that we are deserving of a rest; our values and priorities shift and expand; and we begin to find an ancient wisdom we didn't have before, this wisdom that offers a way of life that feels light and freeing.

By resting in God, we realize we're not alone and we are nourished by something deeply soulful and life-giving.



## **Second: It's a resting in gratitude.**

Part of the rest we need is taking time out to be thankful.

It's an important part of rest because, as Liz Gilbert would put it, gratitude helps shift our attitude and perspective from one of scarcity to one of abundance; it helps us leave behind this mentality that we don't have enough and must always be looking and working for more, to one which helps us find enjoyment and contentment with what we already have been given.

By resting in gratitude, we cease to look over the fence at what our neighbours have and begin to enjoy what's right in front of us.

## **Third: It's a resting for the sake of.**

There's this ancient midrash on one of the creation stories in Genesis that talks about why God "rested" on the seventh day. God, the ancient rabbis would argue, rested on the seventh day because God had work to do on the eighth.

Rest is always done for the sake of something. We don't rest to merely relax. We don't rest to forever escape our problems. We don't rest in the hopes that when we get back everything will have fixed itself. We rest for the sake of being able to persevere, move forward, and grow. There is a deep purpose and intentionality to our rest: we rest because there's work to do.

By resting we find the energy and the focus to go back out and live the kind of life we want to have.

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When we talk about rest, we're talking about a rest that is rooted in God, gratitude, and for the sake of something else.

It's a rest that is necessary for finding, creating, and sustaining the kind of life that's more than a mere existence but a life that's full, deep, and whole.



And we need to hear that. I needed to hear that.

If you're like me, rushing from one thing to the next, coming off a weekend more exhausted than when you went in, worried and stressed, caught up in the death spiral of go-go-go, this is the good news we need to hear:

**“You who are tired, worn and burned out, come to me and I’ll give you the rest you need to keep on living.”**

*Amen*



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# THE PRODIGAL SON – A PARABLE ABOUT FAILURE

REV. NICK COATES

God be with you.

One of the things I like to do, it's something that brings me a lot of joy, is find stories in the Bible that we either don't talk about at all or find some that need to be heard in a new way. I love to open up those stories and ask: What do these tell us about being human and alive in the world?

And today, we're hearing one that's been on my mind a lot lately, one that most of us have probably heard before, if not from churchy stuff, but because it's just become part of our culture and popular discourse.

Today we talk about that story of the Prodigal Son. Which is, we should mention, a parable. It's a particular kind of story Jesus was fond of telling. A story designed to trip you up, to expand your consciousness, and to woo you into new ideas and concepts. As Kierkegaard said, they are stories meant to short-circuit our brains, to literally re-wire us to think and act differently.

And the beautiful thing about parables is that we can really make use of our imaginations and go all kinds of places with them because there's not one way to hear them; we hear them differently depending on whatever we bring to it. As my friend the rabbi says: these parables read us as much as we read them.

And today, we're going to make use of our imaginations and talk about something we should probably talk about more as a church community, something we experience all too often as humans; but before we do that, we'll talk about something we talk about a lot.

If you've been grooving along with us for awhile, and probably even if you've been popping in and out when you can, you may have thought to yourself as you drive home from church,

"Wow. Those guys talk a lot about growth and transformation."

And you'd be right. We do. We talk a lot about how Christian spirituality is about moving and becoming, and how it's bent towards growth.



But when we talk about this growth, we don't just mean "spiritual" growth, we mean all kinds of growth: spiritual, yes, but also relational, communal, sexual, social, emotional, physical, and professional. We mean growth of every kind and of every level.

The growth the Jesus Tradition invites us into is the pursuit of wholeness – it's this movement of reconciling our interiors, of entering into our wounds, doubts, and fears, and moving towards healing, peace and integrity, and through it all, becoming more human and alive.

Are ya with me?

This is why we say it's all spiritual. It's all part of the package. It all belongs.

But here's the thing:

If that is the spiritual life, if that's the journey we're on, it then naturally includes something, something we don't talk enough about, something we need to ask if we're going to really take that journey seriously:

What happens when it doesn't work out?

What do we do when we fall and false start?

**If it's all about growth and transformation, we need to talk about failure.**

We've all been there, haven't we? We know what it's like to fall, fail and false start, don't we?

We all know how that story goes. And maybe we can see it reflected in that parable we heard:

That parable about a son who, raised in the lap of luxury, who has no lack whatsoever, a person of power, influence, and privilege, gets a bit of wanderlust, gets a longing for what is outside the boundaries of what he knows and sees, and so he asks his dad for some cash to go explore, and heads out into the world.

And we're told how he travels into a far and distant land, a place he didn't even know existed, and after years of living the life, where does he end up?

He ends up in a pig pen, ends up starving in the midst of a famine, ends up a powerless stranger; he ends up in a very different place than where he began.

And the son, experiencing this all for the first time in his life, experiencing lack, experiencing powerlessness, experiencing dependency, he has an epiphany. He has what we call a paradigm shift.

He began to see the world in new ways. His values begin to shift. He no longer is that same man who left his father's home however many years ago. He's grown, he's stretched, he's become. He is a new person. Because of what's happened, he's no longer the same dude.

But there's a famine going on. He's on the brink of death and he decides to go home. But, we're told, he wants to go home as himself – as who he is now, not who he was. He's thinking: 'I'll go home, tell dad I'm sorry for bailing, but that I can't come back to what I knew and had and was, that's not me anymore. I just want a job and a bed. I just want to earn an honest wage.'

So he heads back, rehearsing what he'll say to his family, all excited to share his experiences, all set to live differently and carry out this new life, but as he enters the farm boundaries, his dad sees him. He's so overjoyed that his son is back, this son he thought was dead it had been so long, he runs down, they embrace, and as his son begins to tell him of his new life and experiences, the dad interrupts him and says:

'Oh son, hush hush, you're back. Take this ring. Take this robe. Take these sandals. Come back to us. Come back to your home. Come back to this life. Let's have a feast. You were dead but now you're alive!'

And the son . . .

and this is big, this is where we need to pay attention

And the son, looking back on the famine that's raging outside the farm walls, looking back on all that he experienced, all that he learned and saw, on who he became out there, didn't say anything. He didn't push back. He didn't give his speech. Instead, he took the ring, the robe, and the sandals, those symbols of who he was, and went back to where he started.

Despite all that happened, his story ended where it began. Despite all the growth and change he experienced, he went back to what he used to be.

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Hearing the parable that way, I wonder if we know that story. Maybe his story is our story, too.

We know what it's like to leave what's comfortable and familiar, to experience something new and world-changing, and to, just when we're ready to make it a part of our lives, just when we're ready to own that growth, just when we're ready to bravely step out and be new people, we fall, we false start, we fail.

We know what it's like, don't we, to try to move forward in our relationships, in our addictions, in our self-care, in dealing with our wounds and baggage, and not ... quite ... make ... it.

We know what it's like to end up right where we started.

Anyone know what we're talking about? I'm sure we all do.

Failure will do that to you.

It's a pretty convincing beast, telling us that we have no power, telling us we've lost the opportunity, convincing us that our stories are finished, that we'll never grow, never become, never move.

It's no wonder despair is the best friend of failure, leaving us thinking that tomorrow will always be like today so why even bother for something different.



And unfortunately yet understandably, a lot of us end up living in our failure: convinced we've missed our chance and that failure is too powerful to move on from, that we'll never grow beyond the place we're at now.

And to those of us in that space that are struggling with despair, that want our stories to continue, here's the good news:

It doesn't have to be that way.

We don't have to live like that.

Our stories don't need to end where they began.

It doesn't have to be that way because failure can be seen one of two ways:

The way we often experience it: this static thing which takes the road out from underneath us, this thing we fear and avoid, this thing which brings despair . . .

or

as the Jesus Tradition invites us to experience it: this dynamic thing, this thing we accept and embrace, this thing which can propel us forward, showing us the path we need to take, showing us where we need to get courageously curious, which wounds are still healing, which questions we still have to rumble with, which issues we're not quite finished with, what places we still need to explore, showing us the work we need to do to move on.

And we can view failure this way because we believe in grace – this idea that says the Universe is perpetually benevolent and bent towards helping us become people that are whole.

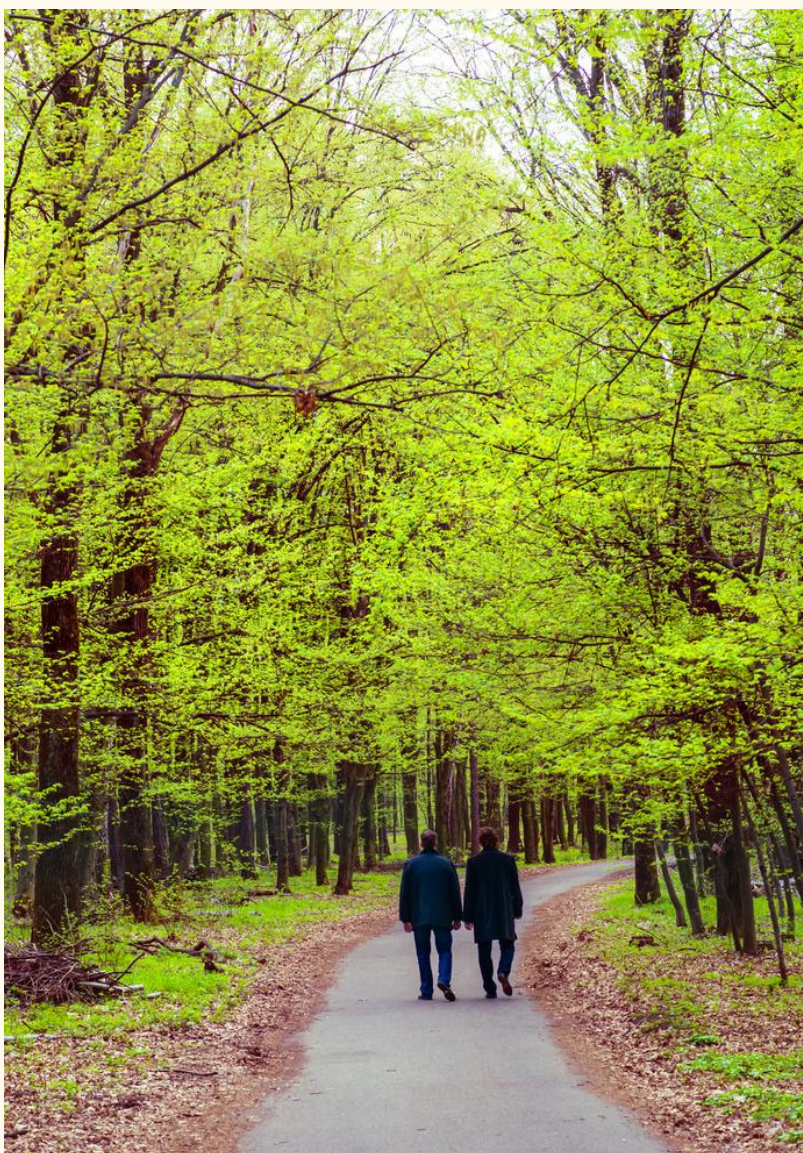
Grace is a game-changing thing because grace changes failure from something lethal to something transformative; it softens the fall – letting us know failure isn't just okay, it's more than okay, it's an important part of the process. Grace gives us strength to cut ourselves some slack and to try again.

Grace teaches us that failure, as Buechner puts it, isn't tragedy, but comedy; to everyone on the outside looking in, it's something to be feared and avoided, but to those on the inside looking out, to those who know grace exists, it's something that makes us laugh with joy because we see the life it brings.

So for you who are trying to grow, who are moving towards wholeness, who are longing to become human, and have encountered failure, may you know that is not the end; may you know this is a gracious world, and your story doesn't need to end the way it begins.

May you keep moving, keep becoming, and keep growing.

*Amen*



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# A SERMON ABOUT BUYING A HOUSE

REV. NICK COATES

God be with you.

So one of the things we talk a lot about at church is how 'everything is spiritual.'

It's the way we acknowledge that not only is everything a spiritual issue – that even stuff like how we spend our money, or go to the park, or how busy we are matters on a spiritual level – but also, if we are attentive and reflective enough, everything has the potential to teach us about the spiritual life. It can all help us think about, imagine, and understand what it means to be human and alive in this world and what it means to be connected with God, each other, and ourselves.

Are you with me?

So, as some of you know, Dawn and I bought a house. Over the past month or so that we've lived there, I keep saying to Dawn: "Ya know, buying a house is a lot like . . ." and then I'll ramble on about some spiritual thing, to which she always replies, "You should write that down for a sermon."

So . . . trusting that everything is spiritual, that everyday stuff can teach us about the kind of life Jesus opens up for us, and having finally written down enough stuff for a sermon, here are four things buying a house has in common with the spiritual life.

So we'll go over them together and after each one I'll offer some questions to take home and sit with that can draw us further into some of these points and tensions and ideas.

## **First:**

The first thing buying a house has in common with the spiritual life . . .

So according to Google Maps, we moved exactly 3.7km east of our last place. We moved from living at the corner of 17th and 35th, to living at the corner of 17th and 14th.

And really, in the grand scheme of things, that's not a whole lot, is it?

It's not like we moved from the country to downtown. It's just two neighbourhoods over. It's like a five minute drive. What could happen in 3.7km?!

But here's the thing we discovered: a lot can happen.

Just 3.7km east, there's a completely different energy to the city. Just 3.7km east, there are more locally-owned businesses and public spaces. Just 3.7km east, the city becomes more pedestrian- and bike-friendly.

Just 3.7km east, and it feels like we're living in a completely different city. It feels more like home than before. 3.7km makes a huge huge difference.

And I think that's got something to say to us as people trying to live the life Jesus teaches us.

When Jesus came on the scene and started teaching people about what it meant to be human, what it meant to be spiritual, what was the way he invited people into that life?

He said: "Follow me."

He said that because the spiritual life isn't about digging in with the right answers, but rather the spiritual life is about movement and growth. It's about becoming. It's about moving step-by-step in Mystery, deeper and deeper into a life connected with God, each other, ourselves.

And throughout the Bible we can see Jesus inviting people into that movement by calling people out of one thing and into another.

And some were huge paradigm-shifting movements:

“Wait, God loves me just as I am?!” “Wait, love my enemies?!” “Wait, everyone belongs?!”

But others were pretty small steps:

"Wait, I should *embrace* my questions and doubts?" “Wait, forgiveness is a process?"

“Wait, God pays more attention to my heart than to what I believe?” “Wait, the right way of worshipping God isn’t the only right way?!”

The truth is, sometimes even the smallest of movements can make the biggest of differences.

In the life we’re pursuing, sometimes the things that we put off because it's only a little movement, sometimes the things we rationalize away because they couldn’t possibly make a huge difference, sometimes those are the very things that will bring you deeper into life and are the very things that you need to do to help you find the home you’re looking for.

So, as people on the move, as people invited into that kind of life, the questions become:

What's your 3.7km?

What distance are you resisting travelling?

What new home is waiting for you just down the road?

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## **Second:**

So I was sitting on the couch one morning. It was the first morning we had our new couch because the original one wouldn’t fit up the stairs (more on that later). I was doing my morning routine, drinking coffee, doing my meditation, and reading the news, when all of a sudden I was caught between two conflicting feelings.



The first one was feeling so incredibly thankful for all the things that made buying a home we love possible ... and the second one was knowing that while I sat on my couch, 1.6 billion people in our world don't have access to housing, let alone have housing at all; or to bring it closer to home, that one in 10 people and 10% of children in Calgary live in poverty – that's 160,000 people who can't afford to do and have what I had and was enjoying so much.

And so I was sitting there, caught between gratitude and privilege, and if you know that tension, if you've been caught up in it before, it's a tricky one to navigate, isn't it?

It's a tricky tension to navigate because at the root of the tension is a really heavy and important question:

how can I live with, when so many live without?

I know, right?

Privilege, once you notice it, can become a really uncomfortable thing.

Now as humans, we don't like tension, do we? We do all kinds of things to get out of it, don't we?

And when it comes to this tension – some of us try to get rid of it through the penance of shame or guilt, others try ignorance, neither of which work very well – the way the Jesus Tradition offers is a different way all together, a way that doesn't help us escape the tension so much as it helps us live within it:

Baked into our tradition is this idea that the only way we can truly live in that tension is through generosity.

We're called to practice generosity because baked into our faith is this scandalous idea that we are all one, that we are all connected, that we are all responsible for one another, that we all matter.



homeless +  
hungry

And for those of us living in privilege, whether that's wealth, gender, material, education, race, whatever it is, for those of us living with, for those of us who have, the way we live within that tension is by being generous.

It's by sharing our clothes with the naked, our food with the hungry, our medicine with the sick.

It's by using our power to make space for immigrants, refugees, the homeless, the marginalized.

It's by using our voice to say black lives matter, that indigenous lives matter, that creation matters.

It's by giving others the benefit of the doubt, by assuming everyone is doing their best, by offering unconditional positive regard to everyone around us.

We live in that tension by recognizing that because we are connected, because we have that responsibility, the only thing we can do, the only way to live, is by lifting up whatever it is we have, giving thanks for it all, and then we break it, and we share it, doing what we can to help everyone have enough.

You'll never escape that tension, but you can create a life where our privilege doesn't separate you from the needy, but bends you towards them through generosity.

So, the questions for you to rumble with this week:

How will you be generous this week?

What privileges do you have that need to be shared?

What can you do to turn your gratitude into generosity?

//

### **Third:**

So the third point takes us to that couch which wouldn't fit up the stairs.

The morning we moved into the new house we realized that the couch would not fit up the stairs to the main floor.



Unless we sawed the thing in two, it simply wasn't going to happen.

Anyone experience that before?

Yah, if you move enough, that's bound to happen.

The truth about moving is sometimes you just can't take it with you because, sometimes, it just won't fit anymore. Sometimes even the stuff you love, the comfy stuff, the sentimental stuff, it simply won't fit.

That's a truth about life too, isn't it?

If this life is all about movement, if this life is all about becoming and growing, if it's about moving step-by-step towards the kind of life Jesus calls us to have, a life of dignity, value, and belonging, a life that sees God moving in everyone and everything, a life bent towards justice and peace and wholeness,

the spiritual task isn't just to look up to what's ahead, it's also about looking at what needs to be left behind because the truth is, sometimes, as we grow and move, things just don't fit anymore.

And we're not just talking about false narratives, lies, and labels. We're not just talking about the things that affirming community and extravagant love do away with. We're not just talking about leaving behind things we want to leave behind.

As we grow, become, and move in our lives and faith, the fact is sometimes the things we love, the comfy things we love to collapse into, the things which have supported us and nourished us, they too will need to be left behind.

A friend and I were talking about this on Friday.

My friend spoke about how because his understanding of God has shifted, that God is no longer a guy up on the clouds we need to glorify and sing songs to, but rather God is this Mystery that's all around us to connect and commune with, he struggles to go to church now because the hymns and spiritual practices he once loved, these practices and hymns that once brought so much comfort and joy, don't work

anymore because he's in a different place. He needed to leave them behind to truly move forward and grow.

And he talked about how while it was so tough to experience, how after some grief and searching, he's found new practices and songs to take their place, ones that fit with where his heart and soul have moved to.

Anyone know what he's talking about? I for sure do. Maybe you've been in the same boat. Maybe you've been experiencing the same thing. And while we'd no doubt love to just take it all with us, the questions we have to ask are:

What in your life – whether it's spiritual or otherwise – isn't needed anymore?

What won't fit up the stairs as you move onward in your spiritual journey?

What space needs to be freed up for something new?

//

#### **Fourth:**

And finally . . .

One of our friends is an interior decorator and designer.

She came over just after we moved in to help us figure out not just what we do with the space, but how we could make it feel like home for both of us. So we're there talking about what a minimalist industrial mid-century modern home would look like, when she said the best piece of advice she could give us is, "It's all about the couch."

The wisdom was: start with the big pieces, the central pieces, things like the couch, and go from there because everything else will revolve around that. The couch would shape the rest of the room.

"It's all about the couch."

Jesus said something similar once.



He was having a conversation with some religious leaders about what the greatest commandment is. They were trying to decide what was the one commandment, the one teaching, that summed up all the others. What they were essentially asking was, "What's the couch?" "What's the one piece that if you got that one right, everything else would fall into place?"

Which really is a conversation about how to be and how to exist. It's a conversation about the one singular mode of being we're really supposed to inhabit.

So one argued that we need to worship God with our heart, mind, and strength; another argued that it's about honouring the Sabbath; another was saying, "No, it's about being kosher." They turn to Jesus and ask him what he thinks the greatest commandment is, and what's he say?

Love God, love neighbour, love self.

Love.

Love.

Love.

As people trying to figure out how to live, move, and have our being, as people trying to figure out what we're supposed to furnish our lives with, love is the couch. That's the thing we need to put front and centre in order to truly live and exist.

Jesus was saying, when it comes to both the lives we're trying to create and the individual decisions and actions we take, the place we begin and end, the thing we always let shape us, is the loving thing to do.

Don't begin with getting what you want. Don't begin with budgets. Don't begin with personal preferences. Don't begin with shame, or fear, or aggression. Begin with love. Love for God, love for neighbour, love for you.



As people who are on the move, remember: "It's all about the couch." Get the couch, get that set up first. Learn that rhythm first and everything else will flow out and you will feel at home in who you are because love is where it begins and ends.

So, some questions for you:

**Do you need a new couch?**

**What's taking up space that you need to get rid of?**

**How can you better let love be the centerpiece of your life?**

*Amen*







## ANDY AND FRAN PORTER CELEBRATE THEIR 50TH OR WHAT TO DO WHEN COVID-19 PUTS THE KIBOSH ON YOUR PARTY!

In some ways it seems like yesterday that we took our wedding vows. In fact, it was 50 years ago this past June 26th. That boggles our minds. Where did the time go?

Andy has always managed to melt my heart. He did it the day he proposed, and he did it last week when he posted on his Facebook page, “Fifty years ago today, the most beautiful woman in the world married me. I’m still somewhat amazed.” Such endearing remarks make me love him as much today as I did then.

When our dear friend Vi Sharpe suggested I write something for the magazine about this special occasion, I was happy to comply. Who better to be the recipients of this news than all our special friends at RDLUC? In truth, as the headline admits, we had originally planned on having a large party. But the pandemic, of course, with its accompanying restrictions, squelched that idea—or maybe just postponed it. We’ll have to wait and see.

Meanwhile, if you look at the photos, you’ll see that we haven’t changed a bit—except maybe to become a tad delusional in our senior years!



The party we actually attended last Saturday evening was one for just the two of us. It was at the Lake House in Bonavista, where we had a lovely table by the lake and watched the swimmers and canoers beat the heat while we dined on one of the most delicious roast lamb dishes we've ever eaten. We both ordered it. See? Simpatico, as always!

To start, they served us champagne so we could toast the occasion right away. And after the meal they brought us the house specialty: sticky-toffee pudding, with 'Happy Anniversary' written on a side slab of dark chocolate that adorned each plate!

Here I have to tell you—or remind you—that Andy is allergic to chocolate, which meant that Fran got both slabs! What can I say? A chocolate allergy is a fine quality in a husband! Andy says he has always wondered if that was a contributing factor to my acceptance of his proposal in the first place!

And if the COVID-19 pandemic has been a historical lemon, our evening at the Lake House saw us make lemonade of the situation as much as possible. For most of the evening, that room with a lakeside table was ours alone, and the gracious staff who served us were attentive and charming. It was a truly memorable experience, shared with my dearest and best friend—my life partner. What more could I ask?

Deferring the party is okay after all. Let's face it: if there's one thing that's just as much fun as having a party, it's looking forward to one in the future!

Respectfully submitted, Fran Porter





## **LOOKING INTO THE ELDER YEARS—LIFE IS A GIFT**

**SUBMITTED BY ANNE WELSH-BASKETT**

*This is right on the nose . . . read it slowly. I do not know who wrote it, but I am guessing it was a senior. I first started reading this and was reading fast until I reached the third sentence. I stopped and started over, reading slower and thinking about every word. This is very thought-provoking and makes you stop and think.*

And then it is winter. You know . . . time has a way of moving quickly and catching you unaware of the passing years.

It seems just yesterday that I was young, just married and embarking on my new life with my mate. Yet in a way, it seems like eons ago, and I wonder where all the years went. I know that I lived them all. I have glimpses of how it was back then and of all my hopes and dreams. But, here it is . . . the winter. How did I get here so fast? Where did the years go and where did my youth go?

I remember well seeing older people through the years and thinking that those older people were years away from me and that winter was so far off that I could not fathom it or imagine fully what it would be like. But here it is . . . my friends are retired and getting grey . . . they move slower and I see an older person now. Some are in better and some in worse shape than me . . . but I see the great change . . . Not like the ones that I remember who were young and vibrant . . . but, like me, their age is beginning to show and we are now those older folks that we used to see and never thought we'd be.

Each day now, I find that just getting a shower is a real target for the day! And taking a nap is not a treat anymore . . . it's mandatory! 'Cause if I don't on my own free will, I just fall asleep when I sit! AND SO . . . NOW I ENTER INTO THIS NEW SEASON OF MY LIFE UNPREPARED FOR ALL THE ACHES AND PAINS AND THE LOSS OF STRENGTH and ability to go and do things that I wish I had done but never did!

But, at least now, I know that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure how long it will last . . . this I know: when it's over on this earth . . . it's NOT over. A new adventure will begin!

Yes, I have regrets. There are things I wish I hadn't done . . . things I should have done, but indeed, there are many things I'm happy to have done. It's all in a lifetime. If you're not in the winter yet . . . let me remind you that it will be here faster than you think. So whatever you would like to accomplish in your life, please do it quickly! Don't put things off too long. Life goes by quickly. Do what you can today, as you can never be sure whether this is your winter or not! You have no promise that you will see all the seasons of your life . . . so live for today and say all the things that you want your loved ones to remember . . . and hope that they appreciate and love you for all the things that you have done for them in all the years past!

"Life" is a gift. The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one.

LIVE IT WELL! ENJOY TODAY! DO SOMETHING FUN! BE HAPPY! HAVE A GREAT DAY!

REMEMBER . . . "It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."

"LIVE HAPPY IN THIS YEAR AND EVERY YEAR."

# WALKING WITH GRIEF





# CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK

*Our thanks to Jackie Walters, whose beloved husband Dennis died in recent months, and who has courageously written this article to share with us about her experience of grieving after her loss.*

I think the biggest learning for me to embody, and that might help others, no matter how old they are or how their loved one died, is: Cut yourself some slack and be kind to yourself.

All you need to do is eat, sleep, breathe, repeat. Especially when grief is fresh and raw.

Someone you loved has died. Your life has changed forever. The ground beneath you has shifted and you don't have a map. Cut yourself some slack. You have a lot of paperwork to get through and decisions to make...ironically, when you don't have the ability to make decisions. The plans you made aren't going to happen. The little rituals or comfortable habits you had with each other have died, too. Cut yourself some slack. Your identity, your way of being in this world has changed. The jobs and responsibilities you each had are now all yours. No wonder grief is exhausting. It's a confusing time and a lot of work. Cut yourself some slack.

*... continued*





You'll find some people understand and some don't. Some are comfortable being with someone who is grieving and some aren't. Some people come into your life that you never expected and some leave. It's OK. Part of cutting yourself some slack and being kind to yourself is allowing others to help if the help is helpful. As a care GIVER it can be difficult to change roles to a care RECEIVER. But it's important. It gives us the opportunity to understand what it's like for others we've had the privilege of helping previously, when we were the givers of help. And it gives those who wish to help the opportunity to do so.

I found it strange to let in Red Deer Lake United Church's congregational care team, but once I relaxed and realized I had no reason not to let them help, it was incredibly healing. I was vulnerable and wondered about feeling judged or being found 'less than.' Instead, I felt part of a community: loved, accepted, and safe.

Yep, that was my biggest learning. As you know, many people want to fix the grief and feel clumsy and helpless in the face of it. They say nothing rather than say something wrong, leaving the one who's grieving alone, just when they need to know someone's there, even if they don't have the energy to answer back.

Megan Devine, the author of *It's OK That You're NOT OK*, addresses this:

See this short sweet video <https://youtu.be/l2zLCCRT-nE>

See her most popular blog post, <https://refugeingrief.com/2013/11/27/ask/>

And see this page on her website <https://refugeingrief.com/helper-overview/>

On top of the resources above that I found helpful, I've attached some quotes. Most are from the 365 days of grief by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, *Grief One Day at A Time*.

### **1. The first is about being with someone who is grieving, listen without giving advice.**

(I think one of the most hurtful things some of us have heard is words along the lines of, 'think of the good times you had' or 'be grateful for the time you did have with your person.' Surely the advice giver must know that we do that already. Are we doing it wrong? Talk about feeling judged!)

Dr. Dee Knight writes:

“It takes so much vulnerability to just be quiet.

To listen.

To not give advice.

To not have answers.

To just sit in other’s turmoil.

The most therapeutic moments of my life

happened when I was invited to share, and that sharing was met

with awe, with silence, with reverence.”

## **2. Then about true wealth being our legacy, which honours the one who died:**

Cesar Chavez: “True wealth is not measured in money or status or power.

It is measured in the legacy we leave behind

For those we love and those we inspire.”

**3. Dr. Alan Wolfelt: “We can also choose to live in honor and memory of the person who died . . .”** which is about honouring something they loved. This was particularly important to me in early grief. (Feb 15)

**4. Dr. Wolfelt writes on March 26, it is about not comparing your grief with the grief of others.** “Your heartbreak is no more and no less than someone else’s . . . if we remember that grief can’t really be weighed and that comparing ourselves to others helps no one, our compassion grows . . . And all of our fellow human beings need empathy and support. We do too.”

**5. This was sent to me by a woman who was widowed just three months after they were married.** He was in his mid 30s when he died suddenly: “Grief never ends . . .but it changes. It’s a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, not a lack of faith . . . It is the price of love.” (Author unknown)



**6. Another quote tells us to take all the time you need to grieve and to mourn.**

It's not linear, it's not logical, and it's a lot of work. Others who don't understand grief may say to get over it, but in general that's because they're uncomfortable being with so much sadness. It's OK not to be OK. And it's OK to be happy. Your loved one is dead and you are alive, so it's OK to live each moment as is right for you.

**7. Another helpful quote basically tells us to be gentle with yourself.**

Allow yourself to let go of other peoples' expectations about what grief is and isn't. The healthiest way to grieve is to allow yourself to feel all of your different feelings. Dr. Wolfelt writes, "You've got to feel it to heal it."

Hope something here is helpful.

Love, Jackie

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# GRIEF PASSAGES

BY ANN BROWN

Grief affects all aspects of our lives – our physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual selves. It is basically a spiritual journey.

In grief, our understanding of who we are, why we are here, and whether or not life is worth living is challenged. A significant loss plunges us into what C.S. Lewis called, “the dark night of the soul.” Life suddenly becomes meaningless. Nothing makes sense. The structure of our world collapses. The pain of this place can seem intolerable, and yet, the only way to emerge to the light of a new morning is to experience the night.

As grievers, we need to stay present with our feelings. Instead of pushing the pain away, try to bring awareness to the feeling and see if you can stay present with whatever you notice.

Buddhist author and teacher Pema Chodron writes, “To stay with the shakiness, to stay with a broken heart, with a rumbling stomach, with the feelings of hopelessness, and wanting to get revenge – that is the path to true awakening. Sticking with the uncertainty, getting the knack of relaxing in the midst of chaos, learning not to panic – this is the spiritual path. Getting the knack of catching ourselves, of gently and compassionately catching ourselves, is the path of the warrior.”

Strength in grief is acknowledging our feelings and expressing emotion. Strength is opening that box of memories, even though you know you will cry. It's saying your loved one's name out loud in public for the first time in casual conversation.

Often you will be able to turn to others for strength and support. However at times other people might not be there when you need them most. In such instances, it's important to draw strength from within to help provide you with the courage to move forward.



Drawing strength from within can come from a belief in a Higher Power. You can also draw strength from meditation. Alternatively, strength can also be gathered through books and spiritual teachings.

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. teaches, “Grieving requires a necessity of stillness. Many of the messages people in grief are given contradict the need for stillness: ‘Carry on’, ‘Keep busy’, ‘I have someone for you to meet.’ Yet the paradox for many grievers is that as they try to frantically move forward, they often lose their way. Times of stillness are anchored in a spiritual necessity. A lack of stillness hastens confusion and disorientation and results in a waning of the spirit. If you do not rest in silence for a time, you cannot find your way out of the wilderness of grief.”

Blessings of Self Kindness and Patience

Love Ann

## ANALOG FOR GRIEF

*Taryn Gammon*

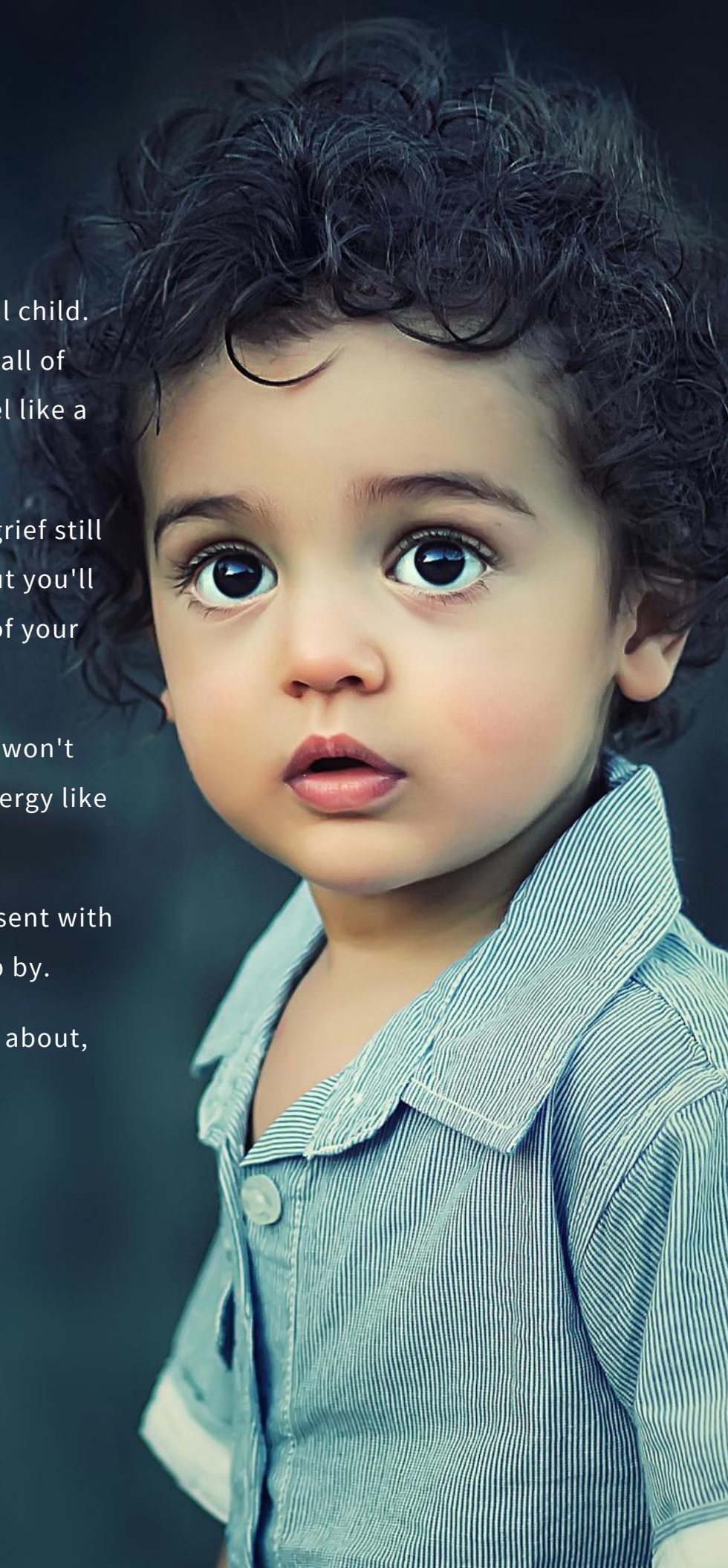
Think of grief as an infant or small child. In the beginning, it needs almost all of your attention. Your grief may feel like a full-time job in fact.

At age four or five years old, the grief still needs your love and attention, but you'll have more space for other parts of your life.

As the years pass, this older grief won't require 100% of your time and energy like it did when it was an infant.

However, you still need to be present with your grief when it decides to drop by.

Your grief, like someone you care about, needs your patience and love.





## GRIEF PRAYER

O Divine Peace

Grief washes over me like waves of the sea  
Just when I think I can live with my loss,  
I'm suddenly pitched into deep anguish again.  
My body and spirit both carry this heartache.  
It constantly tumbles and turns inside of me.  
Lead me to a balance between quiet and activity  
so I can tend to my grief but not be overcome by it.  
Be with me as an assuring presence in my boat of life  
when I am tossed around wildly by the sea of grief.

*Joyce Rupp*







## APACHE GRIEF BLESSING

May the sun bring you new energy every day,  
bringing light into the darkness of your soul.

May the moon softly restore you by night,  
bathing you in the glow of a restful sleep  
and peaceful dreams.

May the rain wash away your worries  
and cleanse the hurt that sits in your heart.

May the breeze blow new strength into your being  
and may you believe in the courage of yourself.

May you walk gently through the world,  
keeping your loved ones with you always.

Knowing that you are never parted  
by the beating of your heart.

*Submitted by Ann Brown*

# We are Red Deer Lake United Church



We are an inclusive and affirming community of faith – people of all ages, perspectives, and stories, who gather to connect with God, each other, and ourselves, and find in Jesus a new way of being human and alive in the world.

**you're welcome, wanted, and accepted.  
join us on the journey.**

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nick@reddeerlakeuc.com

### congregational care counsellor

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### Do you have a story to share?

**A memory? A poem? A photograph?**

**We would love to publish it in the next issue of  
this magazine. Please send your submission to  
info@reddeerlakeuc.com or call us at**

**(403) 256-3181.**

**The next submission deadline is August 1, 2021.**