*About suffering they were never wrong,*

*The Old masters: how well they understood*

*Its human position;*

*How it takes place*

*While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along…*

In WH Auden’s poem the pathos of every day suffering and grief is captured- suffering that does not necessarily gain attention but never the less exists.

It is this pathos that I think Jesus may have felt. Standing on the edge of the city of Jerusalem, He laments over the city for it’s history of violence, for those who cannot hear God, and I think for himself. For he has turned his face to Jerusalem and knows that it is there he himself will die. And yet city life around continues. And he carries on knowing that the cup of his life, the cup of suffering will overflow.

In the gospel we also hear his words of consolation- how God longs to gather her children together, like a mother hen protecting her chicks.

And it is with this consolation in mind, I would like to share some thoughts on how in engaging with bereavement in our lives, we can begin to open ourselves again to the joys in life and deeper trust in God.

Some of us will know great personal suffering, others will be victims of the world’s tragedies, like the tragedy on Friday morning of over 40 Muslim people killed in a vindictive act of violence in Christchurch, New Zealand, holocaust and war.

Others will suffer by knowing the agony of powerlessness as they accompany others in their suffering. Those who nurse loved ones.

Sometimes grief comes at particular life changes- As teenagers say goodbye to childhood and the responsibilities of adult life hit home to them, As women say goodbye to their fertility or men to their virility. As aging comes and mobility or eyesight or mental capacity diminishes.

Sometimes grief comes through external circumstances; employment changes, loss of educational opportunity, unemployment, divorce or loss of relationship, moving house, having to give up driving.

I am sure that if you reflected well you could name the griefs in your own lives, both now and over the years.

We all handle grief differently because we are all different, circumstances vary and every loss is different. The most common feeling is disorientation… off road without a map and we expect grief to be linear A to B when actually grief is more like a puzzle of finding the end of a ball of string.

How in these many different circumstances and in our many different temperaments can we let go and find consolation? For if we do not then every time a new grief occurs the old are magnified and it becomes harder for us to move on well.

Ivan Mann writes of grief and consolation, as a priest who nursed his wife as her motor neurones disease progressed. I find his writing extremely helpful. He explains the following:

In the early stages of suffering my wife watched her body begin to weaken long before the diagnosis was given, she knew herself to be on a slide. Eventually the specialist had the courage to tell her that she would have four or five years of life- no more. Friends tried to persuade her to seek healing. Her intuition was to accept. Her healing came through engaging with the disease in her writing which led to trust and acceptance.

Today I face death

This disease creeping silenty

Now gallops cautiously

I am seen to stumble

And we are all embarrassingly aware.

But today

I also have a choice

Life is now like being on a slide as children’s slide at a park

There is only one direction in which to go

I am falling and I can’t get off

I am sliding into eternity

But I can let go of the sides

And I can lift up my face

To feel the sun’s caress

The wind in my hair

And as I go

Scatter the fresh spring flowers

From my lap

To those who care to stop

And watch

And enjoy the fun.

Her words are courageous but there is no denying the depth of suffering.

Somehow in consenting to bear the suffering she finds the possibility of reaching beyond to find greater freedom. And I think this is perhaps similar to us, who engage with grief. Part of finding greater freedom is to consent to bear the suffering.

So how can we do so?

Kubler Ross speaks of stages of grief, as someone who worked alongside the dying and one of the first people to research the spirituality of dying in the hospice movement. She speaks of the processes that people may go through when they hear of their own death - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The Naming of these emotions has also been helpful for those who themselves are grieving. The processing of these emotions can also bring acceptance of the suffering.

Ivan Mann, puts is differently, He talks of giving voice to the suffering through the telling of story-

**1.Telling the story** of grief allows us to acknowledge the reality and carry our suffering. Expressing our story in safe places helps us to live with the pain we cannot change. If we feel that the facts and feelings have been listened too well then it enables us to grieve well.

We see stories of grief told and retold in the Bible- we know of the grief of the Israelites slavery, told in the book of Exodus and in the Psalms and Lamentations.

*By the Rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept*.

*I am poured out like water- My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth* Psalm 22

We know of the grief of Mary and Martha and the women gathered around the cross.

Walter Brugeman suggests that Jesus deals with many laments, which he names as people’s disorientations- the disorientations of blind, lame, poor, lepers, Lazarus and Jairus daughter. In all of these narratives the needy person comes to Jesus – Jesus asks them what they want and they ask Jesus to come into their life or their house. Jesus listens and engages in the stories of Grief in so many people’s lives. We have the hope then that God can hear our grief, as Jesus listened to the griefs of the world.

Telling the story of grief may not be in words, but in music or movement or art, or in writing a letter to God.

**2. Giving voice to the grief may mean both screaming and silence.**

 ‘When my wife died I could feel the scream inside myself- searing pain that nailed me to the spot and rendered me silent to others but overwhelmed my senses..suddenly all the pain of nursing her for the past five years was condensed into that one moment of her death. I had never known such pain, the pain of someone else’s suffering.

Part of grief is can be to experience anger – anger that can be all consuming, anger at those who have not lost anyone or anything.

*My God My God why have you forsaken me? Jesus cries.*

God can seem silent when we want God to take action.

But anger which is nursed becomes destructive bitterness. Some counsellors call this a grief road block, along with guilt and regret halting an ability to move forward.

We need to remember however, that when normal people go through abnormal events, they tend to act abnormally. Anger is normal in grief, but what you do with it is either constructive or destructive. Lashing out is destructive but holding it in can be equally destructive. By recognizing it early you can deal with it in a constructive manner: “Strike while the iron is COLD.”

Some people find it helpful to cool down then come confront the person or situation with an “I” statement followed by a feeling, followed by a behaviour. For example, “I get angry every time you tell me what to do…”

When we grieve, we need structure but we loathe others telling us how we feel or what we should do about it.

### One lady blogger writes- Ask for Forgiveness. This is the hardest one and the one that makes me angry the most. But, it’s the one that brings the most release. Practice grace. While you’re grieving, you find out that life is all that matters, all else is vanity. The only way to [let go of anger](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692) is to ask for and grant forgiveness.

Tears

Kind David covered his face and cried aloud with a loud voice- *my son Absolam Absolam my son my son (2 Samuel 19)*

*And Mary stood outside the tomb crying.. they have taken my Lord away and I don’t know where they have put him (John 20 v 11)*

The place of tears can express the feeling of the need to search and the yearning for a loved one and in that to cry. Sometimes suffering cannot be immediately alleviated, it is in the fibre of our being, and we bear the grief in our bodies…

**3. Community**

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, the instructions to the early church were to mourn with those who mourn 12 v 15b and in his writing to the Corinthians speaks of the God of comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we have received from God.

Even Jesus needed company in his suffering. 32And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.”

Ivan Mann says ‘ to hold together a belief in the love of God and an openness to the suffering of the world is to become a meeting place where healing can happen, it is to stand in the place of the cross..to know the risk of vulnerable love.’ (p8 A Double Thirst)

As fellow Christians, we bear the cross for each other, as Simon of Cyrene bore the cross of Christ on his journey to death.

* Tell your story of grief in a safe place
* Admit your anger, tears or regret.
* Find company amongst Christians who will share the load.

God who brought us to birth and in whose arms we die

In our grief and shock contain and comfort us

Embrace us with your love

Give us hope in our confusion

And grace to let go into new life

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.