

BEREAVEMENT SERVICE – 7 DECEMBER 2014

THE KEY

Grief is a powerful human condition. It can cause us to feel locked in, our world has changed, we have been put in a new situation, maybe for the first time. There are so many feelings raging around inside - sadness, fear, anger, misery, nostalgia for the past, regret, guilt, hope.

For a while people rally round and listen to you and comfort and reassure. After a while, sometimes not very long, some people expect you to have moved on, you know who your best friends and closest family are then, those who are there for you.

Many people describe feeling locked in with their grief. Going out and about, doing things, meeting people, but feeling distant, separate. Covering up what is sometimes turmoil on the inside while looking normal on the outside. Crying on the inside and smiling on the outside. These feelings might last months, maybe years. A piece of music or smell or familiar place can suddenly bring back memories and feelings so powerfully.

A lady came up to me in tears after a service in Armadale Church last year. She said that one of the hymns reminded her so much of her late husband. I thought that she had been recently bereaved and I asked her when her husband died- she said 19 years ago. And that is entirely normal, that is fine. We can get on with life much of the time and occasionally an emotional reaction breaks through.

In my work as a psychologist, I carry out bereavement counselling usually with children. I have various keys I can use to help children cope with loss - memory boxes, workbooks, activities. I have been working with a little boy for several months who lost four members of his family in a car accident. We recently made a bracelet for him to wear - he chose a colour for each person and plaited the strands together. His brother loved football so we made a papier mache World Cup and painted it gold. We made biscuits and iced them to make different faces, reflecting his feelings on different days. We talked a lot about his lost family, sometimes he cries but he also laughs a lot. Keys and tools to aid the healing process.

But the very best key that can help us cope with loss and give us hope and strength is faith in God and in his son Jesus Christ. It's a key I can't always use with children working as a psychologist. The little boy I've been working with is from a Christian family and he has told me some verses from the bible that have helped him. He

said that his dad went to the crash site the day after the accident and read Psalm 40. So we wrote some of Psalm 40 in his memory book.

Do not withhold your mercy from me, O Lord, may your love and truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me.....Be pleased, O Lord, to save me. O Lord, come quickly to help me....May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you, may those who love your salvation always say "The Lord be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy, may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer, O my God, do not delay

The writer of that psalm, possibly King David, lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born. We are in a better place today because Jesus has lived and died and risen again from death. He has conquered death for us too so that we can live with him forever.

I think there are two ways in which Jesus can be seen as the key to unlock our grief and help us on our journey.

Jesus tells us that he holds the keys of heaven. And in the bible it says that he gave the keys of heaven to his disciple Peter Now Jesus also called Peter his rock and told Peter that he was to establish his church after Jesus had gone. And so Jesus gave the keys of heaven to the church, that is to all believers then and over the centuries and to us today.

We sing in the Easter hymn There is a Green Hill far Away the words - He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in.

Jesus opened the gates of heaven to a criminal who was crucified beside him. The criminal turned to Jesus as they both hung on the cross and asked Jesus to remember him when he came into heaven. Jesus told him that that very day, the criminal would be with him in paradise.

And so Jesus holds the keys of heaven and offers them to us.

Jesus invites us to follow him, to give our lives to him. God is not distant and remote, sitting on a white cloud somewhere! By his Holy Spirit he is here with us.

People sometimes say to me, I don't understand, what do we mean by one God and then talk about God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Is that not three Gods? No, because we believe that all three are parts of the one and same God. God in three parts, also called the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the invisible way

that God, and indeed Jesus Christ, is present with us today, in and around us, here is this place.

Steph McLeod as a young man was off the rails, heavily into drugs and alcohol and homeless. He was taken in by Bethany Trust in Edinburgh and he found Jesus. He is now a Christian singer and song writer. One of his first songs had the words "When I found Jesus, he was standing next to me. When I found Jesus, he was holding onto me."

Jesus is close by and he wants to come closer. It is like the picture of Jesus on the card you were given today. This is a painting that hangs in St Pauls Cathedral in London and I ordered the cards from there last week to give to you. Jesus is standing at your door and he is knocking on the door. Jesus says in the last book of the bible, Revelation 3 : 20 the words I have put on the back of your card – **Here I am! I stand at the door knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him or her and he or she with me.**

Jesus does not force us to follow him, he invites us. The choice is ours. This is illustrated in our painting. William Holman Hunt has painted a door but there is no handle or keyhole on Jesus side of the door. We have to use our key to unlock the door and open it to let him come in.

How do we unlock that door and let him in? Well, it tells us in the passage read by Andrew earlier. Matthew 7 : 7 – **Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be opened.**

It does not mean we will get everything we ask for, it does not mean that bad things won't happen to us, bad things and unfair things happen to Christians as much as to those who don't believe. It does mean that Jesus will be with us in these hard times.

Jesus said "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted"

He said "Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

He promises to give us the keys to heaven and a great reunion with all who have gone before us.

He invites us to open the door even a little bit. When we are in a dark room and open the door a tiny bit, sunlight can flow in that crack. If we have even a tiny bit of faith and a huge amount of doubt, Jesus will come to us and help our little flame glow brighter and brighter.

We are going to sing another hymn and then you can come forward to light candles. And as you light a candle and think of your loved ones in your heart, light the candle for yourselves also and ask Jesus to strengthen you and his holy spirit to fill you.

