

I invite you to dwell on the words so beautifully composed recently by one of my favorite authors, Shauna Niequist. She says, "Grief is subterranean, and webbed - it's like the root systems of many trees planted together, tentacles wrapping around each other beneath the surface. It's like the subway; once you go below ground, today's grief connects to old grief connects to grief you didn't even know was there."

Many of us are feeling grief in ways we never imagined or expected these days. We are grieving milestones in our lives that we always assumed we would be present for - a high school graduation, prom, college graduation, wedding, baby shower, sports season, among many, many other things. And we are grieving what our normal was before this virus shook up the world and all our lives within it. We grieve the ease with which we could see our loved ones, attend worship, go to sports games and concerts, even run errands and give each other a handshake or hug.

Grief has a way of changing us, connecting with past experiences and the anticipated loss of what is coming forth. And it is from an initial place of grief that the people walking to Emmaus begin their journey.

When Jesus initially approached these two people, he simply met them where they were on their journey, from a place of curiosity. He asked what they were discussing as they walked along. And the immediate response was them standing still, looking sad. They were contemplating the death and rising of the Messiah, of Jesus who they believed was the one to redeem Israel. They grieved that Jesus had to suffer, handed over to the authorities by their own people. They were struggling with the words of the women who had seen Jesus alive, that the tomb was indeed empty. One of the people, Cleopas, could not believe this man was not talking about this wild thing that had happened in Jerusalem! The wild thing that was being felt by everyone around, shaking the society and city they knew at its very core.

Even though these journeyers were likely not directly present at each of these events, they were impacted by what was happening to their people as a whole. They grieved the one believed to redeem Israel. They grieved that something entirely new was happening. And eventually they felt the loss of their third journeyer as he walked ahead like he was moving on. Of course they did not know that the third journeyer was in fact Jesus, their eyes were kept from recognizing him. They went along their way in a daze, only three days after Jesus' rising, still stunned by this unprecedented, unexpected, wild thing that happened.

But it is in this entirely new and unexpected situation, colored by a haze of sadness and grief, in which Jesus reveals exactly who he is to the people walking on the road to Emmaus.

Jesus begins telling the stories of the prophets' proclamation, of what would happen to the savior of the world before, during, and after his death. Jesus provides insight on the situation and shines a new light on the journeyers' understanding of this wild thing. He uses strong language, calling them foolish and getting them out of their sadness to think differently about what happened to the Messiah.

And finally, after a long day of journeying, all three of them entered a village for a place to rest and eat. They tended to what their bodies needed and found nourishment. It's from this part of the story that we get the famous lyric in Holden Evening Prayer - "Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and they day is nearly over." How deeply many of our spirits are nourished by this familiar music and lyrics.

After all the stories, the grief, the uncertainty and unknowing, the three sit down to have a meal, to have bread. And it is in the breaking of the bread, that Jesus reveals himself, in all his holy and human power, in all his blessing and bringing new life. Jesus is revealed in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus is made known to us in the brokenness. Jesus' power in who he is as the savior of this world, shows up in the broken places of this world. The breaking of the bread is not just part of the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is the breaking of something so tangible, so very in front of us, commonplace and necessary, that we find Jesus Christ.

The journeyers found Christ in the breaking of the bread. Jesus vanished from their sight upon that moment, but their hearts were changed forever. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was with us on the road?" And from that moment of their hearts being changed, that moment of Christ's revelation, they got up and proclaimed the good news of the risen Christ. Their whole lives changed. They followed the calling on their heart to gather Jesus' followers and proclaim that Jesus was alive once again - the Messiah, the savior of the world, made known in their hearts and in the breaking of the bread.

We physically feel the reality of what is going on around us, our whole lives changed by pandemic. We carry stress and grief and anxiety and the feelings of ourselves and those we love in our bodies - tight shoulders and neck, headaches, stomach pains, all kinds of conditions, physically and mentally that pop up in times of stress. We also feel the spiritual and emotional realness of our situation, our grief, our gratitude, our grappling, and our whole gamut of feelings, burning in our hearts and in our bodies. We are physical, created beings with much deeper understandings of what it is to be human.

Jesus, fully human and fully divine, is revealed in the breaking of the bread. Jesus is felt in bodies, in the bread that is his own body, broken for the love and saving of each and every one of us, all of us, bodies, minds, hearts, spirits. And Jesus is felt in our hearts, the savior who calls us to love God and love our neighbors in all we do, who gives us the insights and comfort we need throughout our journeys.

It is in and for a broken world that Jesus died. It is a broken world indeed when Jesus' own people are the ones to give him up to authorities to be tortured and crucified. It is a broken world in which people commit acts of violence against one another, animals, the environment, and perpetuate systems of abuse and inequality. It is a broken world in which a virus has the power to kill nearly 200,000 people, and that number may be even higher now than it was when I initially wrote this.

And yet it is in this broken world that Jesus is revealed. His grace, his goodness, his mercy, his love. That love is more powerful than any brokenness in this world, more powerful than even death and the grave. Jesus has the power to make our hearts burn with passion and proclamation and service to God and our neighbors. Jesus is revealed in the broken places, not to take away the brokenness or pain but to be present with us in it. Jesus knows what it is to be in this broken world and indeed be broken by this world. But Christ is stronger than any brokenness. We see Jesus' power of new life most clearly in the broken places and grieving spaces.

Jesus is with us every step of our journey, whether we see him clearly or not. Sometimes it takes the broken places that exist in our world in order to see Jesus revealed. But be assured, my dear sisters and brother in Christ, that Jesus is always journeying with us. Even in our grieving in this difficult season, in the brokenness, there is always hope and new life to be found.

We are learning a new appreciation of the things for which we grieve. We will not take the presence and comfort of the ones we love for granted again. We are filled with gratitude for the many ways we get to live our lives in this world that is not only broken, but has beauty and new life too.

No matter where we feel uprooted or where new seeds must be planted, Jesus is with us. No matter what brokenness, pain, or grieving we feel, Jesus is surely with us. Jesus did not die for the perfection and wholeness

of the world, Jesus died for the brokenness and love of the world. And we are so very worthy of Christ's love and the holy presence of Christ burning in our hearts. Thanks be to God, Amen.