

# **“Losing Heart”**

March 29, 2020

Sermon by Pastor Joy Smith

Psalm 27:1, 4–9

*Dear God, we need a little light this morning. We come into your presence with hearts still heavy, spirits weary, and our minds exhausted from the constant reminders of illness, lack of health equipment and community. Remind us quickly O God, with your truth; come into our darkness with the light of your love and peace and hope Amen.*

These days have reminded us of our humanness, our belonging to the human family. We have been reminded about the precious gift of community, of nation. The Corona Virus 19, has been reminded us that no nation is autonomous any longer and that, whether we want to be or not, we are part of the family of nations, and races, and religions.

We need each other now. The fight against this virus cannot be conducted all by ourselves. We can't; internationally or politically, be about our self-interest. We can't afford to walk away from sharing information, resources, and telling the truth.

**Why has this happened?** I'm asked that a lot - and there are folks who say God had a hand in it; that we suffer as punishment for our wrongdoing; or that God arranged this to teach us something; or that God allowed it—which is what TV evangelist, with appalling insensitivity and a gross misrepresentation of Christian faith.

Let me be clear. God did not do this. God did not intend this. God doesn't cause human suffering; God participates in it, experiences it with us. God had a son whose life was cut off prematurely, violently, cruelly.

John Buchanan reminded me – the basic Christian belief—that in Jesus Christ God lived our life, shared our humanity, and died our death—rests on the firm foundation eloquently expressed by the psalmist:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff – They comfort me. That is the promise and the foundation of our faith.

**Here is what I believe**, and that Christian faith is the promise of coming home when we are lost, or separated, or exiled. As we are closed off from family, school, church, our jobs – we are in a new and different place, **the promise is God's good and healing word for us this day.**

In his book, *Eyes of the Heart*, Frederic Buechner, talks about when he was a little boy, his world changed utterly and dramatically and traumatically one Saturday morning

when his father committed suicide. Buechner writes that the trauma forever changed his world and ended what he knew as home.

Buechner, tells about an Easter Sunday at church. The minister from the pulpit asked if there were any of us there who weren't ashamed of our lives. Buechner said her wanted to hurl him bodily out of his pulpit." "The Church", Buechner says, "only remembers the story of sin and shame and the religious life as a story of guilt and sacrifice and forgiveness."

There is another biblical story that isn't heard much, Buechner says. It's the story of exile. "Why not ask," he says, "if there are any of us who do not feel the sadness and loneliness and lostness of being separated from where we know in our hearts we truly belong, even if we're not sure where it is to be found or how to get there, if there are any of us who do not yearn, more than for anything else, to go home" (pp. 75-76). I expect most of us, at one time or another answer yes.

Parker Palmer calls this a loss of our souls. He reassures us – that at the soul level (our deepest core) we hold a hidden wholeness. In the deepest way, we are whole, and **that's the place where we belong to God and we know we belong to God.** There's this hidden wholeness at the deep soul level of our existence."

The soul is generous: it takes in the needs of the world. The soul is wise: it suffers without shutting down. The soul is hopeful: it engages the world in ways that keep opening our hearts. The soul is creative: it finds a path between realities that might defeat us and fantasies that are mere escapes. We have to keep trying especially in "shut down" to bring down the wall that separates us from our own souls and deprives the world of the soul's regenerative powers. (*A Hidden Wholeness*)

The news and the political leaders constantly remind us the symptoms of the virus: cough, fever, sore throat. But symptoms of losing heart is weakness, **fatigue, depression, anxiety, and emptiness.** We just know that something is missing from our lives – but many of us struggle to discover *what exactly* is missing. How many of you have felt these symptoms?

**So maybe we need to be reminded just as much as washing our hands:** We belong to God. God remembers us. God created us and God loves us, protects us – it is then we come closer to God.

And when you feel lost and afraid and uncertain, or when you feel angry and overwhelmed and tempted to hate, turn to the light of Christ. Find your soul again. Open your heart to healing love. Lean on that power that is greater than you, that created you, that placed your soul at the core of your being.

**There may be one positive by-product of the pandemic.** "I believe it's a blessing that humanity in the Western world got this disease," Ami Rokach, a clinical psychologist

at York University in Canada. For the past century, human life has focused increasingly on money and material belongings, which, especially with technology, led to neglect of human relationships. Now that we're suddenly stuck at home, the best means of surviving, psychologically and biologically, is to interact with people by whatever means available, she said. Even as I observed quarantine, I've heard from friends I haven't seen in decades—and, in one case, forty-five years.

“Loneliness is an experience we don't choose. It's always painful,” Rokach said. “When we finish a period of isolation and come out of this, I don't think society will change.

We are slow learners as a species. But we will come out of it and say, ‘Wow, I did all kinds of good stuff.’ Being together may strengthen our interpersonal bonds by illustrating that human connection can help protect our health and save our sanity.”

And it is a good and powerful word for us this morning trying to think and pray our way through these many losses, lack of whatever we knew as normal. And that we may have lost our home. In God's love we are home.

I offer this prayer:

Loving God, Your desire is for our wholeness and wellbeing.

We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.

We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.

We ache for ourselves and our neighbors, standing before an uncertain future.

We pray: may love, not fear, go viral.

Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.

Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,

You, the God who does not abandon. Always welcomes us home.

*(Thank you to John Buchanan, Fredrick Buechner, many other preachers)*