

Series: The Blessing

November 11, 2018

Title: The God of all comfort

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Text: Matthew 5:4

The Second Riddle

The Second Blessing:

Jesus loved to speak in riddles. And nowhere is this more evident than in the second Blessing that He spoke at the beginning of the great Sermon on the Mount:

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Matthew 5:4 Good News Translation

"Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!"

How can it be that Jesus would dare to put the words "happy" and "mourn" in the same sentence? What does being "comforted" have to do with the deep joy and happiness of God's blessing?

It's a riddle. You have to puzzle it out, unpack it, walk it out in your own life!

Living in a broken Creation:

We live in a degraded world. God's good Creation has been enslaved to what Paul calls the "bondage of decay." We know that things could be different, could be better, could be right. And when they aren't, we grieve; we mourn.

We experience the brokenness of God's good Creation in a million ways: the death of a beloved pet, the breakup of a marriage, a devastating diagnosis, the loss of a loved one. We experience this brokenness in the wider world as well: It comes with the earthquake or tsunami, the famine or the epidemic, the endless wars abroad and the outbreaks of violence at home.

Naming your loss:

Take a moment to think about a loss that you are experiencing right now. It may be something that has happened or is happening. It may be something

that you fear will happen. It may be something intensely personal. It may be something happening in the world around us.

Now, take a piece of paper from the back of the pew in front of you and write it down.

Taking the time to name your loss is the first step in solving Jesus' riddle:

"Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!"

Walking Grief's Pathway

Grief's stages:

Grieving a loss is a journey. It doesn't happen all at once. It happens in stages:

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1. Stage 1 is **Denial**: "It's not that bad!"
2. Stage 2 is **Anger**: "Whose fault is this, anyway?"
3. Stage 3 is **Bargaining**: "If only I..."
4. Stage 4 is **Depression**: "What's the point of going on?"
5. Stage 5 is **Acceptance**: "I think I'm ready for a new journey."

Take out the paper you wrote on a few moments ago. Which stage are you experiencing in dealing with this loss? Write it on the paper.

Martha:

The same Jesus who spoke this riddle of happiness and mourning promises to guide us every step of the journey. So what does that look like?

John paints a vivid picture of what it means for Jesus to guide us from mourning to joy when he recounts the story of Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus.

The story begins with Jesus' good friend, Lazarus, falling sick. At first, his sisters Martha and Mary probably didn't think too much of it. Then, as Lazarus' condition worsened, they sent for Jesus. "It can't be that bad! Jesus will come and heal him." What stage of grieving does that sound like?

But Jesus didn't come in time. He arrived four days after Lazarus died. Martha's reaction? Anger and "If only..."

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John 11:21 NIV

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus joins her in her questioning. But instead of getting caught up in the "if only's," He gives her a glimpse of God's greater Story:

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John 11:25-26 NIV

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Isn't that the challenge we face when we are grieving? Can believe God's Story in the middle of the hurt and pain?

Mary:

Moments later He encounters Mary. Through her tears, she says: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But she has no fight left in her. She is consumed with her grief. John tells us that just as Jesus had joined Martha in her questioning, He now joins Mary in her deep sorrow:

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John 11:33-35 NIV

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

"Where have you laid him?" he asked

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Jesus wept.

Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression. Martha and Mary experienced each stage of grief. And Jesus was right there with them.

But how would the journey end?

The God of all Comfort

Moving the stone:

Jesus' journey with Martha and Mary brought them all to Lazarus' tomb. It was a chamber cut into a rock cliff, sealed with a large stone. It is here that we get a glimpse of the reality that Jesus spoke of when He said, "Happy are those who mourn, God will comfort them!"

When He arrived at the grave, He gave an incomprehensible order:

"Take away the stone."

Martha, already reconciled to the fact that her brother was dead and gone, protested. It was too late for such an action.

Jesus replied:

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John 11:40 NIV

"Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

Moving the stone meant opening up to the radical possibility that God was going to do something wonderful to repair His Creation.

With the stone rolled back, Jesus called to Lazarus:

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John 11:43-44 NIV

"Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face."

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

The key to the riddle:

What made this funeral unlike any other? The presence of Jesus, the Lord of Creation. To understand Jesus' riddle: "Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!" we must understand Who is speaking it. It isn't some

timeless truth that we should try to embrace in hard times. It's a proclamation of the King's mission and agenda. He is here in Person to repair His world, one broken heart at a time.

Isaiah foresaw His coming when he wrote:

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Isaiah 61:1-3 NIV

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me...to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

It is only when the Anointed One, the Messiah is present that mourning can turn to joy. Only then can we replace grave clothes with a garment of praise.

The God of all comfort:

When I was in 7th grade I took a shop class in woodworking. I worked for weeks on my first project, only to have it stolen when it was almost finished. I was devastated. I had worked so hard on those pieces of wood, trying to get everything just right. And now all that work was for nothing, lost, stolen, gone.

That evening I took my New Testament and opened it up to Romans 8. I read these words:

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Romans 8:18 KJV

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

God spoke to me in my sadness and loss through those words. He *comforted* me! He told me that this was not the end of the story. The despair I felt was not the final chapter. He would one day make all things right. All I needed to do was trust Him.

He is here to comfort you in the loss that you feel right now. He is here beside you no matter the grief stage you are in. He will guide you as Jesus guided His friends. He will not rush the process, but work His healing in your soul. He is the one who heals the broken-hearted. He is the God of all comfort.

So I would encourage you now to take that piece of paper you wrote on earlier and pin it to the cross. When you do, you are inviting Jesus to join you wherever you are experiencing the hurt and brokenness of the world. You are daring to trust that this is not the end of the story. You are daring to believe that one day He will do what He promised:

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Revelation 21:4 Good News Translation

"He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."