FROM THE EDITOR: FLEXING FEELINGS

Every once in a while, Good Friday is on a particularly beautiful day. Or maybe the season of Lent was especially busy. Perhaps it just happened to correspond with a specifically happy time in your life: an endearing stage for your kids, surprisingly productive time, or a great many other things.

I am partial to Good Friday in part because it is a time set apart to remember we are mortal. When Jesus goes to the cross, when He goes to die in our stead, He goes because death waits for all of us. He takes our judgment and punishment upon Himself so that we are freed from our sin before our heavenly Father.

Seeing how the Trinity confronts death head-on, under a crown of thorns, encourages me in so many ways. But, some years I cannot find the emotional catharsis I am looking for in Lent and Holy Week. While the Spirit continues to work repentance and faith within, my emotions just are not as prepared for grief and loss as when I might have flexed sadder feelings of trust during a penitential season.

Emotions are not everything, of course, but they are something! Grief and loss, or juggling end of life issues, is emotional, whether those emotions are buried deep and varying widely. Death can creep and death can spring. It can startle unlike anything else, yet at other times it seems to lend moments of closure to us as we await the Resurrection.

In a sense, death is as versatile as life, hanging out at the pool as well as hospitals or hospice. But just as death, sadly, can come any time for any age, life can flex its muscles too. There can be a lot of emphasis placed on happiness, by family, friends, and anyone else. Entire philosophies and lifestyles are laid out along the assumption that everyone wants to be happy, some going so far as to assume everyone wants everyone else to be happy!

Now, God will provide us with eternal delight, but there will also be times of sadness and grief.

As He uses our minds and physicality in faith toward Him and to reach out in love toward our neighbor, He can use our emotions too. Not as a litmus test! Not as interpreter of the Word! But as our emotions bouy up and down in the seasons of this life, we are reminded that we will experience suffering in this turbulent world.

The cycle of penitential and rejoicing seasons of the church year help to train our hearts and minds in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. But because Jesus is truly human, and because each of us carry our crosses after Him daily, the church year also helps us to train our hearts and minds—even bodies. They flex our muscles!

Our congregation just lost a beloved retired pastor. It is beautiful outside. Everyone is focused on their farm or garden. But the years that we have put away alleluias, only to take them up again because of the Resurrection, have built a little solace and strength into us for times such as this. We may not feel quite like we imagine we should, but we are joined into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And even as He embraces our brother in Christ—and as He too waits for the final Resurrection and restoration of all things—Jesus feels for us. He gives us His Word to equip and train us, and never leaves us alone.

Mary J. Moerbe
BODIES BROKEN

Pamela Boehle-Silva

He leans sideways in his wheelchair, his broken body twisted and crooked. Dependent. Weak. Chiff-like. Poor. Humiliated. Unable to speak, his eyes convey his frustration, his desire to be rid of this broken body. Take, eat. This is My body, broken for you.

Surgery meant to heal render him “useless”—at least by the world, he sees. Friends, family say, “He wouldn’t want to live this way.” suggesting, “something be done” to end this tragedy. Suffering engulfs him and those who love him.

Take, eat. This is My body, broken for you.


This broken body with its wounds and scars receives Christ’s broken body in simple bread and wine. Familiar words are spoken: “Take, eat: this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins. Take, drink: this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Medicine of immortality given to this broken body—a body still bent with limits that don’t work—a mind still scarred with synapses that misfire.

Twisted, crooked lips receive the body and blood of Christ, giving what it promises: forgiveness of sins and peace.

The world sees damaged goods. Christ sees a body, broken by sin and disease now restored, healed, reconciled—in Him.

** This was written in memory of my father Louis “Spike” Boyle, who suffered a major stroke during a surgical procedure in September 2010. He passed away on October 13, 2010. His last months of life were lived out in the hospital, rehabilitation centers and finally in a board and care home. He died on February 18, 2011, due to complications of pneumonia. Distance separated us as he lay dying, but thanks to a hospice volunteer who held the phone to my father’s ear, I was able to talk to my father, read God’s Word and pray with him until his pastor arrived.

Pamela Boehle-Silva

This was published by The Lutheran Witness’ online column, “The View from Here,” on May 25, 2012. Her experience is also influenced by her years as a registered nurse.

ANNOUNCEMENT

DOXOLOGY, an LCMS recognized service organization and program, rooted in the classic art of spiritual care and informed by the images of contemporary Christian psychology, has announced a new conference open to pastors, church workers, and laity.

“Speaking the Truth in Love: A Compassionate Response to Same Sex Attraction & Same Sex Marriage” will be held August 14-15, 2013, at the University of St. Mary at the Lake Conference Center in Mundelein, Illinois.

This conference will help equip pastors, deacons, other rostered workers and lay alike with the desire and capacity to speak and act with confidence and compassion during the difficult days that will surely follow the Supreme Court decision.

More information will be posted to http://doxology.us and Doxology’s facebook page.
GRIEVE BUT WITH YOUR INHERITANCE

Liz Borth

Grief is an expression of deep mental loss. Sometimes we reserve grief for death—temporal death—and forget that losing a job, moving from the family home, dissolving a marriage, visiting a child in prison, being asked to leave your church, watching your spouse forget you, or wondering where your prodigal son may be, are losses wrapped in grief. These situations force a daily encounter with a life unlike one envisioned and hoped for.

Despite education and instruction in caring for the hurting and lost and those confused over death and earthly separation, we struggle with comforting words and faith based convictions that express the truth of God’s loving control in all these grief laden situations. We learn what to offer when questions of eternity arise, but these encounters are a different loss.

“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.” Well, I don’t really like these plans. They are beyond my comprehension; I don’t know what my next steps should be; I have lost all control. I am grieved that I am a helpless mother, spouse, or provider, and I have lost my dreams.

“The Lord watches over you”—How does God watching over me help as I watch my daughter walk away from me? Will her tears fade from my memory and stop breaking my heart because I believe the Lord will not let me stumble?”

The short answer is “yes.” The promise that our Lord has control of the plans designed especially for you must be coupled with the reminder your plans are not His. Jesus lived with deep emotional loss. He was rejected and abandoned by family and friends; His best friend didn’t recognize Him. He wanted to find another way to make a difference in the world, but He humbly followed the will of His Father, even though He knew it meant bearing so much Himself.

Along our self-hewn path, there will always be encounters with grief. We cannot deny our choices often lead to situations we cannot control or change, and ultimately we grieve that we were so foolish to forget God is the source of life. In spite of the temptation to believe God’s Word is only platitudes of sympathy, share what you know is soothing and healing salve. Our purpose is not to live a peaceful life on earth, but to be in close relationship with God. In His mercy, He has given us an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

Liz Borth