

23rd May 2020

LOSS

“Mostly it is loss which teaches us about the worth of things.”

Arthur Schopenhauer, Parerga and Paralipomena

“Why am I so exhausted in this lockdown?” a minister friend asked. And a chaplaincy colleague enquired: “How will we cope when things are back to normal?” Both of these questions are about dealing with loss.

There is no “back to normal” for us. For anyone who is bereaved, grief brings a yearning for normality. But the only way *that* kind of normal could return is for the death not to have happened. Yet it *has* happened. So the journey from the “old normal” into the unknown will be stressful, uncertain, fearful and long – and, at times, completely exhausting. It’s hard work trying to do normal things in different ways.

But there’s another factor too. We know that, in one way or another, there are stages to grief. The order or intensity of these will vary from person to person. For many in the early stages of loss it’s about “tasks”; for some, it’s being manically busy; for others it’s putting a brave face on; for everyone, it’s hard work. Of course we know it’s difficult at the start, but we expect it slowly to get better as the weeks and months go by. And usually it does. So when we hit a flat spot or even a major crash, three, six, nine months on from the death, we fear it’s all gone wrong. But it hasn’t. This is simply facing reality, a necessary acceptance of the permanency of the loss, an acknowledgement that things will be fundamentally different – forever! It’s what the bereavement theorists mean when they refer to “The loss of the assumptive world.”

Two months into our very different way of living, that’s a factor in our exhaustion too, as the reality, the permanency, hits home. And, like bereavement, that may even make us feel worse than we did at the start. So be patient with yourself and others, and take care of yourself. We may not know what normal is any more. But we *will* adjust to the effects of the loss, even though, like all bereavements, it’s going to take a while.

A prayer for today

Still my anxious soul, Lord. Reveal a glimpse of a new normal through the mists of my pain. Help me to believe that I will find peace and blessings once more. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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