

12th January 2024

Anything

“But now, Heaven knows, anything goes.”

Cole Porter, *Anything Goes*

The first edition of Colin Murray Parkes' *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* was published in 1972, the year before I entered the ministry. I had little or no experience of grief and loss back then, but, in later years, I came to value and trust this research, and the book was formative to my own approach to end-of-life issues and the processes of mourning.

Colin Murray Parkes was among the first to do detailed bereavement research. Based at St Christopher's Hospice in London from 1966, he set up the first hospice-based bereavement service and began his life-long work in the systematic evaluations of hospice work and bereavement support. Among the most often quoted lines from his book are these:

*The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love;
it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment.*

echoed by the late Queen Elizabeth after the 9/11 attacks when she said:

Grief is the price we pay for love.

But it's another quote from Parkes which is in my mind. Reflecting on "something" yesterday, I got to thinking of the number of people who've expressed their helplessness in responding to the grief of others, feeling they should offer "something", but not knowing what that might be, and not trusting it'll be any use anyway. So they end up doing nothing – walking by on the other side, if you like – and, inevitably, feeling guilty about their failure. Parkes sees it differently, and says (talking about the pain of grief experienced by people following the death of a life partner):

*Anyone who turns towards the widow or the widower
reassures them that all is not lost.*

Anyone, doing anything, at any time, turning towards those who are struggling with grief, is doing something good. It "reassures them that all is not lost", that they still matter, that they are not being abandoned to their fate. Anyone ... anything ... any time ... is good. So, what is the "anything" you can do in that context today? We all have something! Because, Heaven knows, our "anything" matters.

A prayer for today

Lord, please take my anything, and help me believe that something good will come from it.

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