It would have been much easier to preach on the Ephesians or Gospel lesson this Sunday, but the anguish that David expresses upon hearing about the death of his son hung over me this week. There is little doubt David had a hand in Absalom being killed, but until we face death in the moment, death can be swallowed up with justification, denial, ambition, or the busyness of life that draws us away from dealing with death at all. David, knowing of his guilt in the death of Uriah, and now Absalom has an extra burden to carry inside his soul, because if Absalom had not been killed, Absalom would have killed David. There was no winning choice for David, as a king and warrior, Absalom tried to wipe David’s army out with his own battalion of men. It was either Absalom died, or David died; a no-win situation.

As humans we like to think that one day peace will reign, but each generation of humans find more and different ways to maim or kill each other, so is there a redeeming message from our 2 Samuel message. I think there is, but it means that each one of us must dig into our own personal lives and deal with grief. Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” What kind of fruit can grief produce?

My sermon today is influenced by Richard Rohr’s daily devotional email called, “An Accumulation of Losses.” Rohr quotes psychotherapist and author, Francis Weller, who has studied grief for decades. Weller says, “

No one escapes suffering in this life. None of us is

exempt from loss, pain, illness, and death. How is

it that we have so little understanding of these essential experiences? How is it that we have attempted to

keep grief separated from our lives and only

begrudgingly acknowledge its presence at the most

obvious of times, such as a funeral? “If sequestered

pain made a sound,” Stephen Levine says, “the

atmosphere would be humming all the time.”

The past 16-17 months has been filled with grief. For several months the Covid virus forced each one of us to walk with the thought of death seeking us out, just by being in the presence of another person. The virus still stalks, even with the vaccine striving to keep us safe, so can we do what David, Jesus, and other people have said to do, “Grieve?” Grieve our fears, grieve our disappointments, grieve our loneliness, and let go of a wish that the virus will disappear tomorrow.

Francis Weller gives us a way to deal with our losses. I quote him again,

It is the accumulated losses of a lifetime that slowly

weigh us down—the times of rejection, the moments

of isolation when we felt cut off from the sustaining

touch of comfort and love. It is an ache that resides

in the heart, the faint echo calling us back to the

times of loss. We are called back, not so much to

make things right, but to acknowledge what happened

to us. Grief asks that we honor the loss and, in doing

so, deepen our capacity for compassion. When grief

remains unexpressed, however, it hardens, becomes

as solid as a stone. We, in turn, become rigid and stop moving in rhythm with the soul. . . . When our grief stagnates, we become fixed in place, unable to move

and dance with the flow of life. Grief is part of the dance.

You might be thinking right now that today’s sermon is a real ‘downer’. After all, who wants to talk about death and why it is important to grieve. Yet, David, even as an accomplice to the death of his son, Absalom, grieves deeply. And we have much to grieve also, life during the last 18 months has been hard. We have suffered in our isolation, and we have suffered with our fears. We have grieved when members of our family have gotten Covid, some who lived through it, and others who died. We need to let go of a way of life, that may have been too frivolous, but now each trip we take is measured and methodical as we struggle staying safe. Grief stays very close to us, as it probably should.

Even without a virus in our lives, life is filled with suffering. Divorce, loss of employment, normal family dysfunction, and there is the physical and emotional dysfunction that is not typical, but goes beyond the bounds of what it means to be human. David’s family was filled with typical family dysfunction, and the atypical dysfunction leading to murder and mayhem. Suffering and grief were a part of David’s personal experience, even though he caused much of his suffering by his choices.

And then, we read these words from Psalm 130, a poem written by someone in crisis, “*Out of the depths have I called you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice … for there is forgiveness with you*.” This psalm honestly confesses human frailty and sinfulness but finds hope in the forgiveness of the LORD. This psalm is an olive branch, meant to give us hope, when we feel no hope. Where do we find our hope, we find it in the LORD?

We know that we will all die eventually, but there are layers of death. And during our personal encounters with tragedy, illness, loneliness, family angst, and depression, we are told that mercy is meted out when we own up to our grief. When we hit bottom, and call out, both for human help and Godly help, we are met with mercy and grace. And this is our hope, to be met with grace, a love and friendship extended during times when we might not deserve it, yet, grace is freely given without judgement. Christian Wiman calls this the ‘goodness glue’, God’s goodness. Grace is not something that God gives, grace is WHO God is. And we are to emulate the grace of God.

I read the Ephesians passage, and I think, “there are so many platitudes to emulate,” so is there a way to deal with an angry heart, an unforgiving heart for yourself and others, or controlling the way I think or talk, the list is long. And then I turn back to this simple idea of grieving the things we cannot change, and allowing love and mercy to fill our being rather than our hearts turning to rigid stone. I can’t change the people in my family to be different, or to think different, or to just do what I think is best. I can only grieve, or let go of my self-centered wishes for them to be like me. I mean, who do I think I am? Somehow, I must allow grief to be a normal part of my life. This is the redeeming take away from the scripture passage in 2 Samuel.

Jesus tried to tell a crowd of people to trust him with their lives, or in his words, “*I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life*.” These words of Jesus are not meant to be a bumper sticker, they are designed for us to wrestle with and explore what they mean for each of personally. Jesus says he is the source for living life. I need to figure out how to trust Jesus myself, so grieving becomes a natural part of my daily experience. Jesus just tells me to come and trust. Amen.