



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

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Theme for April

Grief – the practice of breaking open

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others.

More online at www.wbuuc.org/themes.

QUESTIONS

What grief have you experienced in life?

How has grief been supported or discouraged by the people and culture around you?

How do you find ways to have your heart break open without breaking apart?

How has grief broken your heart open to deeper compassion, healing, or love?

QUOTES

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.

- *Henri Nouwen*

You that come to birth and bring the mysteries, your voice-thunder makes us very happy. Roar, lion of the heart, and tear me open.

- *Rumi*

Every death lays bare what really matters...

- *Barbara Brown Taylor*

A broken heart is not the same as sadness. Sadness occurs when the heart is stone cold and lifeless. On the contrary, there is an unbelievable amount of vitality in a broken heart."

- *Elizabeth Lesser, co-found of The Omega Institute*

Grief is the price we pay for love.

- *HRH Queen Elizabeth II*

Life is glorious, but life is also wretched. It is both. Appreciating the gloriousness inspires us, encourages us, cheers us up, gives us a bigger perspective, energizes us. We feel connected. But if that's all that's happening, we get arrogant and start to look down on others, and there is a sense of making ourselves a big deal and being really serious about it, wanting it to be like that forever. The gloriousness becomes tinged by craving and addiction. On the other hand, wretchedness--life's painful aspect--softens us up considerably. Knowing pain is a very important ingredient of being there for another person. When you are feeling a lot of grief, you can look right into somebody's eyes because you feel you haven't got anything to lose--you're just there. The wretchedness humbles us and softens us, but if we were only wretched, we would all just go down the tubes. We'd be so depressed, discouraged, and hopeless that we wouldn't have enough energy to eat an apple. Gloriousness and wretchedness need each other. One inspires us, the other softens us. They go together.

- Pema Chodron, from *Start Where You Are*

POETRY & LYRICS

Meditation on Broken Hearts

Let us enter into a time of meditation, contemplation, and prayer.

Feel the earth beneath your feet as it supports you.

Feel the love of this community as it surrounds and enfolds you.

Feel your breath as it flows in
and out of your body.

Listen to your heartbeat.

Listen to your heart...

And how is it with your heart?

Does your heart feel whole, shielded by intellect, cocooned by reason,
closed to feeling?

Or is it broken, fragile to the touch, brimming with the pain of loss?

Or has your heart been broken and healed so many times
that it now lies open to the world,
knowing that true growth comes not without pain,
that tears may wear down barriers,
that we may carry the hearts of others
even when our own is too heavy for us to bear.

None of us has an unblemished heart, not one.

For such perfection can be found only in death,
and we who are alive still have much to heal.

So let us give thanks for the broken places in our hearts,
and in our lives.

For it is only through such brokenness that we may truly touch one another
and only through touching one another that the world may be healed.

Let us give thanks then for the brokenness that we share.

- *Thomas Rhodes*

oh antic God

oh antic God
return to me
my mother in her thirties
leaned across the front porch
the huge pillow of her breasts
pressing against the rail
summoning me in for bed.

I am almost the dead woman's age times two.

I can barely recall her song
the scent of her hands
though her wild hair scratches my dreams
at night. return to me, oh Lord of then
and now, my mother's calling,
her young voice humming my name.

- *Lucile Clifton*

Personal

Don't take it personal, they said;
but I did, I took it all quite personal—
the breeze and the river and the color of the fields;
the price of grapefruit and stamps,
the wet hair of women in the rain—
And I cursed what hurt me
and I praised what gave me joy,
the most simple-minded of possible responses.

The government reminded me of my father,
with its deafness and its laws,

and the weather reminded me of my mom,
with her tropical squalls.

Enjoy it while you can, they said of Happiness
Think first, they said of Talk
Get over it, they said
at the School of Broken Hearts
but I couldn't and I didn't and I don't
believe in the clean break;

I believe in the compound fracture
served with a sauce of dirty regret,
I believe in saying it all
and taking it all back
and saying it again for good measure
while the air fills up with *I'm-Sorries*
like wheeling birds
and the trees look seasick in the wind.

Oh life! Can you blame me
for making a scene?
You were that yellow caboose, the moon
disappearing over a ridge of cloud.

I was the dog, chained in some fool's backyard;
barking and barking:
trying to convince everything else
to take it personal too.

~Tony Hoagland

Japanese Bowl

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls that were made long ago
I have some cracks in me they have been filled with gold

That's what they used back then when they had a bowl to mend
They did not hide the cracks they made them shine instead

So now every old scar shows from every time I broke
And anyone's eyes can see I'm not what I used to be

But in a collector's mind all of these jagged lines
Make me more beautiful and worth a much higher price

- *Peter Mayer*