

A Note About Grief and Anxiety During This....Slow and Frightening Slog

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Do not be afraid. Fear is the true enemy. We are at war with an unseen enemy.. The shelves are bare. There are lines OUTSIDE Walmart with police monitoring temperamental customers who don't remember how be patient. There are people in nursing homes and care facilities who can not see their loved ones, friends, or have contact with their churches. There are people sick and dying of COVID 19 and all the other things they were sick and dying from before COVID 19. We have to grieve them and bury them in absentia. Seriously – IN ABSENTIA. There are tithes and offerings, payrolls and maintenance, government guidelines, virtual worship (how does one even begin to do that?), relief package legalese, Zoom and Facebook Live, preaching to a screen, copyright questions, uploads, phone calls, meetings with unintentionally muted people, technological Luddites and whiz kids, rebels and fear mongers, naysayers and armchair experts, empty streets and parks but open beaches.

Did any of us really know what flattening the curve meant before March 1?

Is it really only April 7?

2020?

Still???

Yeah, okay, you now know a bit what my Monday morning was like. Alright, truth, my Monday morning and afternoon. While the content may not always be the same, the frenetic nature of it has been very similar on most days. I am sure this is not unique to pastors or involved lay people, but we have the added responsibility to navigate the spiritual implications of a pandemic. While we do have our faith and our hope in the Good Shepherd to guide us, we are not without stress. Some may be experiencing a great deal of stress. This is, experts tell us, a natural reaction to today's circumstances. We are grieving the stability we have lost, the security of our future, the loss of life, the loss of normalcy. Some are grieving the loss of confidence in institutions they once believed would always be there to provide in emergencies. We have lost something – each of us. We have lost someone – even if that someone is a name on the television. Grief abounds in our society, in our churches, and in our homes.

Grief and stress dear friends. They wear on our immune system, on our sleep patterns, on our memory, and cognitive functions. A few days ago, I realized I was experiencing a profound sense of grief because I have felt it before. My first husband, Kirk, died over 10 years ago. In the midst of that terrible grief years ago, I felt like someone had gone into my brain, opened all the file drawers of information, and thrown all of my organized thoughts into the air. WHOOOSH papers and files and thoughts and stress and grief in a huge terrible mess in

my brain. In Kirk's time of illness and after his death, I was having to make decisions I did not want to make; decisions I was ill-equipped to make. I had to process huge amounts of information when my brain was overloaded. I had to answer people's questions, do my work, navigate my faith and relationship with God during my very own living book of lamentations. And, you may guess, I struggled to keep up. But over time I found coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of that turbulent time which I continue to utilize during times of great stress. Here is my list of helpful hints for coping with extreme stress – don't worry you don't have to become an expert, just choose any that seem helpful and none if they don't. Just don't stress about it.

1) WRITE IT DOWN

Stress and grief can mess with our ability to process our thoughts. So, have a notebook or a tablet or a phone and write it down. IT is whatever you need IT to be. To do lists, notes on conversations, where you've put important papers, people you've spoken to, prayer lists, dates, ideas.... WRITE IT DOWN because in times of great stress we forget. Our brains know how much they can handle and that's it. Don't force your brain to take on more than it can. Alleviate the stress of forgetting and WRITE IT DOWN. If you have a conversation with someone, following up with an email can help both of you to remember.

2) REST

We feel tired when we grieve and when we experience stress because we are tired. There are chemicals in our bodies going crazy and one of the best things we can do is rest when our bodies say rest. If we don't, our bodies will make us rest. We will get sick. We will get cranky and people close to us will make us rest. I know there are people out there with responsibilities and young families and other situations which may impact your rest. Do what you can to address that because you need it.

3) GET SOME EXERCISE

Our bodies, minds, and spirits need exercise for so many reasons. When we are extra stressed we feel extra tired, exercise allows the great natural chemicals in our bodies to flow freely, lower our heart rates, make us feel good, increase our oxygen. If you don't exercise, meditate, do yoga, calm your body and breathing. (Six feet apart, people. Six feet apart.)

4) DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU NEED TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS RIGHT AWAY OR EVER

If you are an elder, deacon, or other lay person who thinks your pastor be informed like he or she watches CSPAN, PBS, CNN, and FOX News and reads the New York Times, Washington Post, Harvard Medical Journal, Wall Street Journals every day while also spending hours in prayer, correspondence, long range plans in case we are still sheltering in place in Advent, then stop it. If you're a pastor who thinks you need to seem as if you do those things, then stop it. No one deserves that pressure and no one can do what you're asking.

**5) GIVE YOURSELF AND OTHERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FAIL, FORGET, FALL
ASLEEP, DROP THE BALL, BE LESS THAN, HEAL, LEARN, RECOVER. YOU KNOW –
GRACE**

This is important in these days because we are all going through grief and stress due to the COVID19 Outbreak, but we are all experiencing these in different ways and varying degrees. Grace is key to coping with stress and grief because we must be able to walk the difficult path in our own time and pace. This in turn means we need to allow others to do the same. Grace with ourselves and others, loving others as Christ loved us, acknowledging we need help and each other goes a long way to communities and individuals thriving through stress.

6) PRAY

This one should be at the time and in between each of the others. Pray any way you want to, but pray. If you don't, if you can't, let someone know so they can pray for you until you're able.

This is a sad and challenging time. Give yourself and others a break. Remember Maundy Thursday – love each other and allow yourself to be love. Serve each other and allow yourself to be served.

I hope some of these are helpful. Don't forget, if you like one or two, **WRITE IT DOWN** or you might forget.