

Service of Light in the Darkness
December 3, 2017
Rev. Devon Anderson

Welcome. I am so glad each of you here this afternoon. Trinity has been offering this service for several years, and it's our honor to do so. The service is intended to be a time to gather at the beginning of the holidays for quiet and light and hopefulness. It's intended as intentional space to bring our burdens of grief or suffering or confusion or pain or worry and hold them, acknowledge them, be gentle with them. Sometimes there doesn't seem to be room in the holiday season – with its busy and its happy and its glamour – for burdens. So, we make room here, so we can lift them up.

Last month I came upon a lovely little piece by John Pavlovitz that I'd like to share with you. It's entitled, "Grief: The Uninvited Holiday Guest," and though he is speaking here directly about the death of his father, his eloquent and gentle words can be applied to just about any circumstance of pain that we bring with us here this afternoon.

Every year, since my father died, I hope the uninvited guest doesn't show.

Every year around this time I think, 'Maybe this will be the year that he won't make an appearance.'

The season begins and at first things go well. I can feel quite fine for a while, even unexpectedly buoyant as the muscle memory of the holidays catches me by surprise – and I let my guard down. I actually begin to fully consent to the joy.

I fool myself into believing I won't have to contend with him – I mean grief – this year, and all he brings with him when he barges in, unannounced and uninvited – the mess he so recklessly tosses into the fan. For a while I begin to feel like I've been given an annual reprieve – and I exhale.

And then it happens: A song on the radio, a smell coming from the kitchen, a photo on my timeline, a keepsake unwrapped for the first time in twelve months – and there he is, sitting close beside me again: this Grief that doesn't take a holiday.

At first, I'm rightly angry at the intrusion, annoyed that he's once again broken open those locked away rooms in my heart that I try all year to fortify. I resent the lump in my throat and the tears streaking down my cheeks and the void I'm feeling again because he's here.

I don't want this right now. I don't want him in this house. I want Grief to let me be for one freakin' season so that I can receive those tidings of comfort and joy that I'm supposedly entitled to but never seem to get my arms around.

I want Grief to leave.

But then I realize that he hasn't come here uninvited to do me damage. He's come here to surprise me with a gift that I hadn't asked for, wouldn't say I wanted, but so desperately need.

This gift Grief gives me is this terrible, painful, bittersweetness that reminds me just how well loved I was by my father to be feeling such sadness now. This heartbreak is a monument, these tears a tribute.

That's why Grief is here. He is the tax on loving people, and the fact that I am feeling such a deficit in his presence is a celebration of how blessed I've been, to have someone – and something -- to grieve so fully over.

Grief is here right now to give me the gift of feeling it all again freshly, so that I never forget how beautiful those holidays were, how easy gratitude was, how effortless singing a song of joy could be.

And yeah, maybe this is all much more difficult now, and maybe I'll never have a holiday quite like the carefree ones quite like that again because of the subtraction that's taken place – but this uninvited, unannounced Grief reminds me that just as my father left a legacy of love with me, so I'm given these days to do the same with those I hold dear.

I have THIS season and THESE holidays and THIS moment to be present with those I treasure; to make memories and create traditions and notice beauty – because that is what those we so miss right now did with us while they could.

They shared their “now” with us, while grieving the “then” they missed, too. They celebrated life while being visited by Grief too. This is what love does.

So while I tried my best to avoid him this holiday season, and while I don't like some of what he brings when he shows up, I think I'll invite Grief in for a while.

I think I'll welcome Grief this year.

Amen.