Suffering - An Easter Reflection

I have been pondering a lot lately on suffering, sadness and grief. As I write this, I am aware of the number of people who have farewelled much-loved family members. Both individuals and families are facing pressures like never before, including serious health issues, financial stress and in some cases, job insecurity. Globally, our world is being torn apart by conflicts, with far too many men, women and children bearing the brunt of decisions that they are not responsible for. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:22, "*the whole creation has been groaning…"* It can leave us feeling overwhelmed, helpless and even hopeless…

Easter is a time when we remember that the God that we serve and worship was also a God who knew suffering. Jesus knows what it is like to be hungry, to be misunderstood, to be falsely accused, to be treated like a criminal, and to die. The Cross of Easter reminds us that we are not alone in our suffering.

But as we know, the story does not end at the Cross. The Holy Spirit comes upon the lifeless body of Jesus and fills it with a power that not even the cruelty of crucifixion could overcome. Somewhere between Friday and Sunday, death and suffering lost the battle once and for all.

"**Where**, **O death**, **is your** victory? **Where**, **O death**, **is your sting**?"

(1 Corinthians 15: 55, NIV)

"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.
The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
(Psalm 34:17-18, NIV)

Learning to lament is simply allowing the sadness to come forth, naming it and honouring it by putting words to our grief.

Your losses are real. They matter. And God understands. Jesus is called the 'man of sorrows, acquainted with grief' (see Isaiah 53:3). He will meet us in our sadness, He helps us express it, and He is the healer of every broken heart. (John Eldredge, 30 Days to Resilience).

What are some ways you can honour your grief and sadness?

Prepared by Anna McGookin, Mercy Associates Network Facilitator Victoria and South Australia

And so, for those of us caught between Friday and Sunday, we remind ourselves that the same Holy Spirit is with us as well. As Tyler Staton writes: "The Spirit is the Comforter present with us in our suffering. The Spirit is the Advocate, redeeming our suffering. The Spirit is the Counsellor guiding us through the processing and healing of our wounds. The Spirit enables us to continue the cruciform ministry of Jesus, suffering in love on behalf of others". (*The Familiar Stranger,* p. 178-179). In ways we cannot always understand or readily see, the Holy Spirit brings dignity out of our suffering.

None of us gets to choose if we will suffer grief and loss. Chances are, we all will face a season of deep trials. The only choice we have is how we will respond to that suffering. Suffering exposes our weaknesses and shows us how vulnerable we are. However, suffering can also build in us many positive characteristics – courage, humility, empathy and compassion.

"In 1831, when she founded the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley designed an ivory cross upon an ebony one for the sisters to wear as part of their religious habit. The white insert in the centre represents new life, hope and possibility." (Caroline Thompson, *Be As Shining Lamps,* p.45*).* What does the Mercy Cross symbolise for you? Are there some ways you can share new life, hope and possibility with someone this Easter?

Through the obedient life of Jesus, we are introduced to a God who has both the power and compassion to remove suffering. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus, we see a God who doesn't always remove suffering, but who always redeems it. My prayer is that during this season of Easter, you will see and experience both.

"Take courage my heart, Stay steadfast my soul.
He's in the waiting. He's in the waiting.
Hold onto your hope, As your triumph unfolds,
He's never failing. He's never failing."

("Take Courage", Songwriters: Jeremy Riddle/Joel Taylor/Kristene DiMarco,
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