

BROKEN HEARTS WIDE OPEN

The Reverend Dr. Anne Gavin Ritchie, Pentecost XXI 2021

When I heard this year's stewardship theme, *Hearts Broken Open*, I immediately remembered an old Carly Simon song, which features the refrain, "So don't mind if I fall apart, there's more room in a broken heart." When I heard it back then, my own heart had been fractured, several times. But I *also* knew the *promise underneath the cost*.

No one wants to experience a broken heart. And not only for emotional reasons. Studies show that a painful loss can have physical effects. I remember one time when the loss was so painful, I literally felt a pain emanating from my heart. It left me the moment the situation was resolved.

But some situations *never* resolve. *That's* when we have some choices to make. We can go numb so we no longer *feel* the pain. Unfortunately, that tends to dull moments with family or friends that would otherwise delight us.

Or we can go the *distraction* route. Workaholism is a common "solution," especially because it is so rewarded. "Wow! She never leaves the office until 8 o'clock!" That choice may lead to recognition and promotions, but it begins to rob us of living. We become separated from the *non-working* parts of ourselves... sometimes separated from our very *being*.

There's always the possibility of denying that the sadness even *exists*. "I was never that much into him anyway." "There are plenty of good times ahead!"

From my reading of today's Gospel, that's what the *disciples* do when faced with the prospect of a broken heart. Jesus repeatedly predicts his suffering, death and resurrection. His friends seem not to hear a *word* Jesus says. They don't ask him *anything* at all. They don't ask how it will happen; or how they might prevent it; or even how Jesus, their beloved teacher, may be *feeling*.

Instead, a few focus on what positions of power and glory they might be granted. It's almost as if they don't care about what happens to *Jesus*, as long as they get what they consider their *due*.

They choose not to participate in something extraordinary just because it might break their hearts. So they're left alone with their own shallow ambitions. They effectively abandon Jesus even *before* he reaches the cross.

Jesus warns them that they don't know what they're talking about. Their association with Jesus will ultimately put all of them in danger. *Still* they do not listen and they do not understand.

Their story is *our* story, of course. Distraction and denial. But that is not the *way of the cross*, the way that leads to transformation and new life.

Faithfulness to the way of the cross is what author Alia Joy is talking about in her book, *Discovering God in All We Lack*. This is what she writes:

“In the summer of 2012, I knelt over the frail shell of a child, my son, strapped to all manner of medical monitoring equipment. His body failing, his frame thinning, the medical staff at Arkansas Children's Hospital was at a loss. They had no answers, no direction. He was an anomaly they'd said, and they'd need to regroup after making him as comfortable as possible. Though the medical community struggled to sort it all out, my *faith* community seemed to have every answer.

“God would provide, one said, because God would respond to my great faith. God was setting up a miracle, another said. God works all things together for good, I was reminded. Platitude, platitude, platitude. Silently I wondered, did all those words amount to anything, well-meaning though they were? Hunched over my son, all those platitudes haunting, my phone rang.

“It was a pastor from another church in my hometown, and as I answered the phone, I wondered what platitude I might hear. That there was a purpose in my son's suffering? After an exchange of greetings, I clenched my jaw. Stiffened. *Braced* myself.

“Through the phone I heard only three words: *'I'm so sorry.'* There was a pause, and he told me to holler if I needed anything. He said he'd be praying and that was that. It was a moment in which this person of the cloth didn't force-feed me anemic answers or sell me some fix-all version of a bright and shiny gospel.

Instead, he did the work of Christ himself; he *entered* into my suffering. And years later, after a long season of healing (both my son's and my own), his words served as a reminder of the Christian response to suffering – we enter into it together, share in it together, lament with each other.”

That's what the original disciples failed to do – but *we* still have a chance! A chance to enter into each other's lives *deeply*, in times of joy but *particularly* in times of challenge and loss.

In this *deep community*, our hearts *are* broken open. Open to acts of giving we may never have imagined for ourselves. Open to *generosity*, no longer something we pat ourselves on the back for, but just what we *do* for and *with* one another... as natural as breathing the *air* we all share.

As writer Mary Gelinis observes,

“Generosity is contagious and generative. When people are generous in interactions they feel included and cared about, and want to make constructive contributions. New ideas get generated and people get excited about how to make them work.

“Although generosity is expressed through out actions, it grows from an *internal atmosphere* or state of mind that is spacious and kind, *not attached* to people being generous in return. When we are generous we are not envious of or competitive with colleagues or friends, and we do not look down on them.”

Instead... “We are generous to the *future* that we are *creating*.”

In the next few weeks we'll be focusing on forming this deep community, marked by generosity of spirit and action. We'll discover so much that we are becoming, *together*.

With open hands. Open minds. And most of all, with

broken hearts wide open.