

“You’re Blessed”  
Matthew 5:1-12  
July 28/29, 2007  
Rev. Susan Bresser

*Steel Magnolias* film clip: M’Lynn (played by Sally Fields) is burying her daughter Shelby who dies at the age of 27 and leaves a young child. Following the burial, M’Lynn is surrounded by her friends at the cemetery.

M’Lynn: “I understand it in my head [that Shelby died], but would somebody please explain it to my heart.” Isn’t that a fitting description of grief?

This is what life feels like right now for many of us here at church (dumping the 1000 pc. Jigsaw puzzle on the floor, throwing two pieces far away) ... chaotic, messed up ... We can’t put it together because we’ve lost some pieces. And, frankly, some of us don’t even have the energy to start putting things back together. Oh, in time, in time ... but you know what, it will never ever again look like the front of the box.

We live in a world that is damaged, inadequate, not quite perfect. We’ve been reminded of that over the last two weeks. We are not insulated from death, pain or grief. Even as God’s people, we are not insulated.

Last week in worship Rev. Sam, our district superintendent, shared God’s word with us and God’s healing touch. We offered a healing blessing through anointing, when parishioners left the worship service. One woman, leaving the sanctuary, said to me, “I don’t feel any better ... I feel even more

empty.” I’m not about to chastise that person, because I, too, was empty. It was hard to offer a sense of wholeness when my own heart was heavy and my own soul felt pretty empty.

To me, it’s just a reminder that we’re in this together. It’s like God is holding up this great big sign that says: **DON’T FORGET; YOU’RE IN THIS TOGETHER.** We’re in worship together. We’re in the kingdom together. We’re on a journey together.

I found this quote and have carried it around with me all week (and even sent it with our youth and adults leaving on the mission trip):

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.”

As I get older I am constantly reminded that we can’t do this – this thing called life – by ourselves. We weren’t created to live solitary lives. We are called to be community.

You know, all of this presents a challenge. We have all experienced grief and loss. We all have in one way or another. We’re just not immune to those feelings of emptiness. And now a tragedy hits our congregation. The challenge presents itself in worship, too. I want to be able to speak to all of you regarding grief, but also want to make sure we are loving and supporting our brother Scott and his family. The other challenge: if you’re visiting with us today you can obviously tell we are dealing with grief in our community. If you’re a visitor today, please be patient. And please come back. We are working through a process of grieving and in that grief, we are, and will

continue to be, a community of strength, committed to sharing God's love. We do ask again and again and again that you all remember Scott and his wife Debbie and their family in your prayers, as they have experienced a great loss.

We were in the middle of this great sermon series, but we've scratched it. I honestly don't know what next week will bring, but what's important is that we gather as a community, a community of faith and of hope. I believe now we are presented with a teaching moment: to remember why we gather.

We are a community of strength ... I want to say that to those of you who are visiting with us today, but I really want to say it and say it loud and clear to those of you who come here every single week. Even at our weakest moments, we are still a community of tremendous strength, because we're a community of faith. We've got God. We don't just have human support; we have God support! That's pretty important and pretty powerful.

We are the light of the world, even when our world is pretty dark.

I'd like to share with you some things that can be helpful to this community and to our friend and his family:

1. Don't avoid the family or the individuals who are mourning. We worry sometimes about what to say or do. The worst thing we can do when someone is grieving is to do nothing. Send cards, emails, notes of encouragement and support. Go ahead and make a phone call with one phrase: I've been thinking of you.

2. Don't think you have to say the "right thing." You don't have to say anything. You just need to be present. Just stand by: physically and emotionally. Sometimes your presence shows more support than anything else you can offer.

3. Learn to listen. Learn to listen not to "words" but to "feelings." If we don't help or allow feelings to be shared, then those emotions that are repressed will become toxic and will harm those who need to process grief.

4. Expect those we are grieving will experience a multitude of feelings. Crying one moment, laughing the next. We also need to allow room for numbness. It's expected.

5. Share the Word of God, but please do not use words of scripture that will manipulate or condemn. That's just not helpful. Use scripture that is meaningful to you in your time of suffering or loneliness.

6. Share stories. If you have stories that relate good and positive memories, share them. We need to know that our loved ones are living on in the hearts of others. We need to know that our loved ones have made a difference. I remind you again: share good memories.

And allow those who grieve to tell stories. They might need to tell the story over and over again as they process death and loss.

7. Do not share stories that just aren't true. I understand that you want answers. Please do not assume that what you hear from your next door neighbor is the truth or what you read in the newspaper is the gospel. Scott will share with this community when he is able to share. Please remember that this family is dealing with many legal issues ... issues we can't even begin to comprehend. Scott will share when he is able to do so.

8. Pray. In our time of sorrow and loss, prayer is helpful when it comforts. Prayer is helpful when it leads everyone into the presence of God. For those who believe in the power of prayer, they believe you when you say "I've been praying for you." And they allow themselves to feel it. Prayer can carry us through a time of tragedy. Please know that Scott and Debbie have felt your prayers.

9. Understand that the grieving process will take time. Be patient. Don't ever say: just get over it. From the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... notice the word WALK. We can't run through the valley and we can't outrun our shock, our anger, our grief. Be patient.

10. Understand the four areas of grief:

Accept the reality of the loss.

Experience the pain of the grief.

Adjust to an environment in which those who have died are no longer with us.

Redirect the emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship or cause.

Why do you need to know this? Why do you need to know any of this?  
Because we're all responding to grief right now. Even if you're on the periphery, you're still a part of the community and we still want you to be a part of the community. And in this community, we work together.

Some of you will say: "But I didn't know Whitney." Maybe not, but you know Scott and you know Debbie and you know Isaac. Maybe you didn't know Whitney, but we love and support her dad and her family at this time.

There is a #11. Have a sense of humor. It's okay. *Steel Magnolias* film clip: M'Lynn and friends are still in the cemetery. M'Lynn wants everyone to feel her pain and she wants to lash out to the world. It becomes a point of humor when one of the friends (Clairee) offers to hold another friend (Ouiser Boudreaux) so M'Lynn can haul off and punch her.

We're in this together.

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

We are a community of God's children. Maybe we are broken right now (pointing to the jigsaw puzzle), but we have one another and we have God. We may need support to hold us together, but its God support.

We are blessed to be a part of this community.

Prayer ...