

Celebration Of Life

“The heart stops briefly when someone close has died. A breathless pain strikes as you hear the news. The one, who has held you, now moves from the outside to your inside. Slowly, your heart starts to adjust to its new-found weight.”

I first heard these words during my time as a hospice volunteer, but it resonates with anyone who has experienced profound loss. The grief that follows can feel overwhelming, like waves on the ocean, sometimes crashing with unbearable force and other times stirring gentle ripples of memory. And then there are moments of stillness, when the doldrums of loneliness creep in.

Though the hurt never fully leaves us, healing begins over time. It comes through the grace of God, the love of friends, and the power of our cherished memories. Together, these become the foundation for hope.

The Journey of Grief

When we celebrate life, it's not just the lives of those we have lost, but our own as well. We celebrate in the spirit of hope and healing. We know that there's going to be long, cold nights. The painful emotions on anniversaries and holidays, can be especially difficult. But it's also a time to reflect on the ways we find strength amidst grief.

Grief is like the sea; its waves can crash over us unpredictably, but it also ebbs and flows, offering moments of peace. Healing begins when we lean on God's promises, the love of our community, and the gift of memories that keep our loved ones close.

Symbolism of Hope

As we move through grief, we inevitably ask, "What is hope?" It's more than just a wish for something good; it is a virtue, grounded in the promises of our Creator. God communicates His love and assurance through His Word and through the world around us. We often see this in symbols, such as doves, rainbows, and even the everyday coin in our pocket. They're reminders of His presence and His promises.

The dove is a powerful image of hope. In the story of Noah, after the floodwaters ravaged the earth, Noah sent out a dove. Again and again, it

returned with no sign of land—until one day, it brought back an olive branch. That simple gesture became a symbol of peace, healing, and God’s faithfulness.

Likewise, the rainbow reminds us of God’s eternal covenant with humanity. Its beauty takes our breath away, lifting our thoughts heavenward. It is a sign of His enduring love, a reminder that even in our darkest moments, His promises remain steadfast.

Personal Stories

For me, the symbolism of a coin offered comfort during my own time of loss. A coin has two sides: with the face on one side representing time on earth, and the other, an eagle, representing the spirit in heaven. Like the coin, we have both a physical and spiritual existence. But at times, we may feel the other side of the coin is too far away. We have to do what the coin says, “In God we trust”. When you spin the coin, notice the two sides become one. They remind us that in the fullness of God’s presence, where there is no separation. Someday we will be made whole.

I recall one of my most memorable hospice experiences; a woman with Alzheimer’s who, despite her condition, communicated with me through a simple but profound connection. One day, when I asked if she was lonely, she looked directly into my eyes, holding her gaze with raw, undeniable pain. I said to her, “I pray for you every day, but soon, you will be in heaven, and you can pray for me.” Her radiant smile in that moment was unforgettable. Even now, I think of her and ask, “Are you still praying for me?” I feel that bond, transcending time and place, and it brings me comfort.

We all have memories like these. They are gifts—reminders that the love we shared with our departed ones is eternal.

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As we remember our loved ones, we also celebrate the joy they now experience in heaven. I imagine them surrounded by countless souls from every generation, united in worship before God. They proclaim, as Mary did in Luke’s Gospel:

*“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

*for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.
All generations will call me blessed.
The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name."*

This image of eternal joy comforts me, and I hope it brings you peace as well. Like Noah, we may feel waves of doubt as grief clouds our hope, but we can find strength in God's promises.

Closing Prayer/Reflection

Throughout history, Psalm-23 has been a source of comfort and strength. Go back and read it again. Imagine it as the voice of a sheep speaking about and to its Shepherd. It begins with the sheep sharing the goodness of its Shepherd with others: "He refreshes, He guides." Then it becomes personal: "You comfort, You prepare." and concludes by never wanting to leave the Shepherd. Finally, it ends with a declaration of belonging, and a bond that will never be broken.

I conclude with my personal version of Psalm-23. It's one of relationships that express my gratitude, provides strength, and gives me hope.

*You are my Creator, my Provider, and my Protector.
You are my deepest and dearest Friend.
You are my Savior and my gentle Guide.
You are my most Merciful Judge, and my Everlasting Life and Happiness.
To you oh God, do I take great joy in saying that I belong, forever, totally to you.*

Thank you for allowing me to share this with you. May you find peace, comfort, and hope in the days ahead.