**This is Something I Know All Too Well**

FCCH May 25, 2025

Rev. Karla Miller

When writing her book on emotions, Atlas of the Heart, Brené Brown posted a question on social media: What is your favorite sad movie?

Guess how many responses she had?

OVER 100,000!

What are **your** favorite sad movies?

Some of the films that came up over and over were:

*Life Is Beautiful*

*Terms of Endearment*

*Beaches*

*The Color Purple*

*Steel Magnolias*

*Brokeback Mountain*

*Every movie ever made where a dog dies.*

Some of the reasons people loved a certain film were:

*Beautifully devastating and relatable*

*I cry every time, but is it so incredibly joyful at the same time.*

*When I need a good cry I watch this movie…*

*I don’t really like the sadness, but it I am so affected by it….*

Why do we “like” sad movies? Because we LIKE to be moved. We want to feel connected to what it means to be human, to be reminded of our inextricable connection to one another. Sadness moves us from our own individual lives to a sense of being a part of the collective “us.”

Brown writes, *“Sadness is important and we need it. Feeling sad is a normal response to loss or defeated….To be human is to know sadness. Owning our sadness is courageous and a necessary step in finding our way back to ourselves and each other.”* In other words, we can’t be fully present to others’ sadness if we can’t be present to our own.”

————————

Sadness along with hopelessness and despair are places we go when we hurt.

————————

Hopelessness and despair are wrenching emotions.

Hopelessness is the emotion that emerges out of a combination of specific negative life events (such as a precarious financial situation or job loss) and negative thought pattern (especially helplessness and self-blame.)

Despair is when acute hopelessness and acute sadness drench every part of life. It is the sense that there is no end to suffering and pain we are experiencing; there is no way through the struggle and suffering. Dr. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor defined despair as suffering without meaning. Despair makes one feel that life is utterly meaningless and useless.

——————————-

Hopelessness and Despair is something the writer of Psalm 88 knows all too well.

*“My life draws near to Sheol, my soul is full of trouble, I am like those forsaken among the dead, cut off from your holy hand, I am in the depths of the Pit, the regions so dark and deep, my eyes are dim…O Lord, why do you cast me off?* I am desperate….

In Hebrew thought Sheol is an underworld place of stillness and darkness which is death. It is a nothingness, a shroud of shadow of endless deep.

It’s oddly comforting to me that our ancient ancestors of could describe the very real experience of despair and hopelessness. It makes us less alone.

—————————————

I want to clarify that hopelessness, sadness and despair are NOT the same as depression. They are feelings that can contribute to depression, which is a condition, defined as a period of 2 weeks or longer during which there is a low mood, loss of interest, loss of pleasure that is accompanied by other symptoms that reflect a change in functioning, such as

Hopelessness, sadness, and despair are feelings that can contribute to such as problems with sleep, eating, energy, concentration, and self-image’.

————————-

We are living in a time where sadness, despair and hopelessness seem to be running rampant in our lives.

Just this past Tuesday, the WaPo published a piece entitled: *“White House Officials Wanted to Put Federal Workers in Trauma: It’s Working.”* Drawing from interviews with more than 30 former and current federal workers across multiple agencies reveal a mental health crisis like no other. The chaos and mass firings have left workers feeling devalued, demonized, demoralized and scare for themselves and the country. I They describe problems they’d never experienced before such as panic attacks, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Others with a history of mental struggles said they’d found themselves pushed into even more terrifying territory.

Which makes sense, given that some have found themselves fired, rehired, then let go again. Many have been ridiculed as “lazy” and “corrupt.” They’ve been locked out of offices by police, fired for political “disloyalty,” and told to check their email to see if they still draw a paycheck. In response to these policies, White House deputy press secretary Anna Kelly said, “President Trump wants all Americans to thrive under his administration, and he has done more than any president to end the chronic disease crisis in our country.”

After two months in his new job, on Feb. 14, Richard Midgette was fired. He cleared out his desk at Yellowstone National Park headquarters and drove home, blasting rock music to drown out the sound of his own sobbing. The route home took him across the only bridge in Gardiner, Montana. Midgette said that he has never suffered from depression or other mental health problems, but still, he sat in his idling car just past the bridge, overwhelmed by dark thoughts. He wondered how he would pay for a new apartment lease, his student loans and medicine for his Crohn’s disease. He considered jumping off the bridge while he recalled the foolish pride he’d felt when he first put on a National Park Service uniform after besting 200 others for an IT job he had worked years to attain. Instead of taking his life, he called a friend who came to him immediately.

“I thought I was finally getting somewhere,” he said, “building a career and a life.” In April, he was rehired only to be fired a second time — after courts ruled some of Trump’s layoffs illegal, then legal again.

——————-Treating people like this, in my opinion is criminal. It certainly is cruel.

Many of you know have been affected deeply by the policies and threats of these past months~~directly and indirectly.

You know people who have lost their livelihoods.

You know how the toll of cuts to assistance programs has limited non-profits ability the most marginalized because you volunteer at IAM or the Boys and Girls Club.

You have borne witness to the news of the atrocities of ICE raids in neighborhoods.

You have showed up for rallies and written your congresspeople, you have offered financial support to Planned Parenthood and American Civil Liberties, Union you have read and analyzed and shared important videos and articles and thoughts across social media…

and yet,

it feels like banging your head against a wall,

your sadness is real,

your hopelessness rises in your throat

and your despair twists your stomach and intestines into knots.

When you wake in the middle of the night,

you toss and turn til dawn.

You want to be hopeful.

You don’t want to fall in the pit of despair,

but the edge is all too close…

Why doesn’t anybody care?

——————————————

*I suffer your terrors; I am desperate….*

*They surround me like a flood all day long;  
    from all sides they close in on me*

*….They surround us like floods and the sides are closing in…..*

———————————————-

I know the feelings of despair and hopelessness of the Psalmist all too well. Many of you do too. Or have beloveds that do. In these days, they have been exacerbated.

————

I have shared before my own journey of despair, hopelessness, anxiety and fear before. They are all symptoms of the clinical depression that as been with me for years.

I first became aware of it in my mid-twenties. I was so mentally and emotionally debilitated that I couldn’t function—I couldn’t work, I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t sleep, I could barely get out of bed.

My despair was deep and painful, wrenching and so, so sad. Suicidal ideation was foremost in my thoughts.

Thankfully, I had a network of friends that supported me through this crisis. With time, treatment of talk therapy and medication were healing, and over and over my caregivers reminded me that taking medication for depression was no different than taking medication for diabetes.

Since then, my illness has been managed with major setbacks and hard won slow successes. Even still, on occasion, the tiny flutter of that old lie, shame around having depression rears its ugly head.

This is what I have learned:

When the despair and hopelessness lean in,

I must give it space instead of denying it.

It is better if I am curious about it, asking it what it needs.

——

I call on my team to remind me I am beloved by God, by my family and friends. When I can’t believe that, they believe that for me.

——————————

I practice hope.

Yes, hope is a practice~~not a feeling.

You don’t have to FEEL hopeful to practice hope.

There are myriad ways to practice hope:

through engaging in

Mindfulness…

Breathwork…

Gratitude

Asking for help…

engaging in Community

Helping and serving others…..

—————-

Let me clear~~practicing hope doesn’t necessarily mean that everything will work out in the end. It’s more about how we choose to be and function in the face of the shitstorms of life.

It is easy to give in to hopelessness and despair. We have to surround ourselves with the practices and people who remind us that this is our one and only precious and wild life to live (Mary Oliver).

I’m reminded of the apostle Paul, who suffered from some sort of disability or chronic illness which felt like a burden. He also thought it was a burden to others, but the church of Galatia showed him otherwise. In his letter to Galatians he was deeply grateful that instead of treating him like a burden, they welcomed him as if he were an angel of God. (GA 4:4)

————————-

Dearest friends,

This is what church is~~embracing one another as if the other were an angel of God.

And so,

If despair and hopelessness are bubbling around you,

I urge you to practice hope.

I urge you to give voice to your fear, your sadness, your heartache, your distress, your loss of hope—not just to yourself, but to God, and to others.

I urge you to treat yourself as if you were an angel of God,

And I urge you to find others to welcome you as an angel of God.

And remember to welcome others as if they were angels of God.

——————————-

When the floods of life rise up and threaten to drown you, it’s so so hard.

This is something I know all too well.

Practicing hope can be slow and uncomfortable.

This is something I know all too well.

But you are an angel of God.

WE are angels of God, gifted with this one wild and precious life.

This is also something I know VERY well.

Amen.

**Sources:**

Brené Brown, **Atlas of the Heart**, 2022

“White House Officials Wanted to Put Federal Worker in Trauma: It’s Working, May 20, 2025, Washington Post online, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2025/05/20/federal-workers-trump-mental-health/>