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10/01/2018 | Monthly Topic, Regrets

No regrets?

by Angela T. Khabeb

It was the day after Thanksgiving 2005, Black Friday, the shoppers' delight. As my friend, Michelle, and I pulled into the mall parking lot, I had a terrible but fleeting thought; my baby hasn't been very active today. But I quickly dismissed the idea. I swept it away, telling myself, you're tired so the baby is probably tired, too. I was blissfully pregnant and blissfully ignorant. Our baby was stillborn seven days later.

I regret not turning to Michelle and saying out loud, "My baby hasn't been moving." Being the mama bear that she is, she would have insisted that I seek medical attention immediately. She would have said, "I'm taking you to the emergency room."

Now, I'm not saying that it would have made a difference, but at least I would be able to say as a mother, I did everything I could to protect my unborn child. In the thirteen years since this tragedy, I've rehearsed that day countless times in my mind. I kick myself that I merely dismissed my concerns out of hand. If a genie popped out of a lamp and granted me one "do-over" that would be it.

Every year, as the air turns cooler and pumpkins appear on neighborhood porches, I know that Thanksgiving is coming. As summer gives way to autumn, lamentation pushes to the forefront of my mind. Certainly, over the years, the pain has greatly diminished. But in this grief journey, I have promised myself that when the feelings come, I will feel them. If tears come, I cry them. I resist the urge to wall off or ignore unpleasant feelings.

This is countercultural to some degree, given that our society often touts a "No Regrets" approach to life. Pop culture notwithstanding, one thing I've learned is when we bury our feelings, we bury

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them alive. Paradoxically enough, the more we choose to deal with them, ultimately the less we will have to deal with them.

Years ago, I heard a therapist say that we should never wallow in regret, but every once in a while, it's okay to take off our shoes and swish our toes around in it. Although she was being facetious, I think she's on to something. Even though it can be a messy process, recognizing my own regret has helped alleviate some of the pain of the tragedy. Ultimately acknowledging that regret has led me to deeper compassion and fuller understanding, making me a better wife, mother, and pastor. Being honest with myself has helped me live into healthy grace-filled relationships with others.

Some people treat the very word regret with fear or disdain. But regret is universal. It is simply a part of the human condition. I wonder if Jesus, our fully human and fully divine savior, experienced a pang of regret when he witnessed Mary's and Martha's heartbreak at the death of their brother, Lazarus. What did Jesus feel when Martha met him weeping and screaming, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."? Likewise, what did Jesus feel when Mary fell to his feet echoing her sister's lament, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Did their sorrow pierce his heart, causing him to weep openly and bitterly? Jesus traveled to Bethany with the expressed purpose of raising Lazarus. Yet John's Gospel tells us that Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled . . . and Jesus wept" (John 11:33-35). Even in the light of certain resurrection, regret is near.

What did our Savior feel as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? Did he regret bringing Peter, James and John with him? He urged them to pray, telling them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). But instead of praying, they fall asleep.

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Jesus, our Savior, fell with his face to the ground and repeatedly pleaded with God, "take this cup from me." Luke's Gospel teaches us that when Jesus prayed this prayer he was "in anguish" (Luke 22:44). Here we encounter Jesus in a situation where his humanity is undeniable. I can feel his regret even though he knows that beyond the cross is resurrection. Good Friday's pain momentarily eclipses Easter's joy. But thanks be to God, this is not the end of our story.

Jesus knows the depth of great suffering personally and intimately. That means that Jesus knows the pain we carry and invites us to trade our sorrows for his joy. Our regret, hurt and disappointments are sources of wisdom and insight on our faith journeys. In that sense, we can count them as gifts. Thankfully, there is nothing in our past, present or future – positive or negative – that can separate us from the love of God. There is absolutely nothing in the world that is stronger than God's grace. Thanks be to God!



The Rev. Angela T. Khabeb serves Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.. She enjoys an active home life with her amazing husband, Benhi, and their three wonderful children Konami, Khenna, and Khonni.

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10/01/2018 | Faith Reflections, Monthly Topic, Regrets

The gift and challenge of having regret

by Angela T. Khabeb

re-gret: a feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over something that has happened or been done.

What if you encountered a powerful and benevolent genie who could grant you one do-over of your choice? Would you consider going back in time and doing something differently?

I don't know about you, but I've made enough mistakes in my life that I would welcome a do-over or two. I'm sure I'm not alone. But occasionally, I encounter people who say, "I have no regrets." Or, "I don't believe in regrets." Although I find their words hard to believe, their logic goes something like this: "Everything that's happened in my life up to this point has made me the person that I am. I wouldn't change a thing."

Such claims encourage me to question their definition of regret. Perhaps there is some confusion between guilt and regret. There are certainly some similarities, but there's also a major difference. Guilt is the result of having committed a specified or implied offense or crime. The word carries an automatic value judgment. After all, guilty people recognize that they have done something wrong and ought to be punished somehow.

But doesn't regret carry a different connotation? Isn't regret simply a part of the human condition? Isn't regret a natural result of the gift of hindsight? I contend that regret is universal.

I am reminded of Paul's words to the Romans. Paul laments that knowing what is right is not enough. He wrestles with his own actions in a way that's familiar to everyone. "For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need

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help! . . . I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. . . . Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time" (Romans 7:17-20, The Message).

Maybe when people say they have no regrets, what they actually mean is that they refuse to allow past disappointments, mistakes, or even tragedies to negatively affect their lives today. But acknowledging regret can be cathartic and even empowering. Having regrets does not mean that we are bad people. Regretting a decision we've made doesn't negate our good intentions. Neither does it speak to our character or our self-worth.

My father always told me that most people make the best decisions they can at the time that they make them. Fortunately, retrospect often offers us more enlightened perspectives. As we reflect, through wisdom's lenses, on choices we've made, we usually recognize alternative paths. More life experience typically leads to more awareness, understanding and insight.

Regrets span from trivial to tragic

Regret is an interesting thing. There are things I regret doing, and other things I regret not doing. There are also things I regret that were done to me. Certainly, our regrets span the continuum from trivial to tragic. For example, when I go through old photos, there are more than a handful of hairstyles and hair colors I should have avoided. (Don't even get me started on the Jheri Curl in junior high). But also in that box of old photos is a picture of a dear friend who died by suicide. I thought about her often the week before she died. I wanted to call her but decided to do it later. I regret that decision. It's not that one phone call from me would have made a difference necessarily, I don't think, but at least my friend would have known that she was deeply loved and treasured.

Ultimately, regret is both gift and challenge. We make mistakes and we learn as we grow. We fall and we rise. It is all part of the abundant life that God desires for us. Our faith gives us a foundation based on God's promise of transformation. Fortunately for us, Jesus is intimately aware of our human condition and offers us grace upon grace. Our Savior invites us into abundant life so that we can live fully in the grace of God. Grace is vital because we are flawed. Grace makes us acutely aware that sometimes our decisions or indecisions lead us down a regrettable road. But thankfully, no matter where our paths take us, God's mercy intersects with regret and our faith journey flourishes.

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God uses our life experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly—to shape us into a sharper image of the resurrected Christ. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18).

As people of faith, we are lifted above guilt and shame by God's grace. We receive the gift of retrospect and insight, which allows us to embrace new wisdom without judgment. Ultimately, as people of faith, our hope is in our promise from sacred scripture. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose" (Romans 8:28). Since we have such a hope, we act with great boldness -- regrets and all!

Discussion questions:

1. Do you think it is possible to live a no-regrets life? Share your thoughts.
2. What positive impacts have regrets had in your life? (Think about wisdom you've gained from challenging life experiences.)
3. Describe a time when you recognized the hidden hand of God at work in your life; bringing good out of regrettable situations.

Closing prayer

Gracious and loving God, thank you for your gift of the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. Free us from the power of guilt and shame. Empower us to live into the fullness of abundant life that you have given to us. Open our hearts to receive your transformative grace and teach us to be your disciples. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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09/01/2018 | Monthly Topic, God is with us

A Litany for the Homesick

by Elizabeth McBride

Loving God, we thank you for accompanying us in all our paths from our homes. We acknowledge this blessing and give thanks for all the people in our communities who have helped us to arrive at this place.

God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.

Faithful God, we ask that you bless us and help us as we adjust to our new surroundings. Do not forget us as we venture bravely into a new community. We understand that taking risks to meet others is not easy and we ask that you guide us through this transition.

God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.

Caring God, help us honor our pasts and the homes that we have come from. Protect our loved ones in our absence. We recognize that these places of home will change as we will be changed by our new experiences. Please give us grace to accept these changes and know that eventually they will be good for those we left behind and for ourselves as we grow.

God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.

Strengthening God, give us patience to endure this time of transition with open hearts. Help us to listen to ways that you are calling us as your beloved children. Guide us on our paths as we discern the ways that we can be blessings to all whom we meet.

God of love and mercy, hear our prayer.

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Comforting God, please be with us when we are lonely and not comfortable in our new surroundings. Help us to remember our baptism and that we are beloved and perfect as we are—as you created us to be. Help us to remember that even if this period of adjustment takes time, you are always with us. Help us not lose faith in ourselves and in you.

God of endless love, hear our prayer.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Elizabeth McBride remembers what leaving home for college felt like and the many months it seemed to take to feel comfortable. She is the editor of Café (<http://boldcafe.org>).

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