

Standing Your Ground
Hebrews 10:32-11:1

10³² But remember the earlier days, after you saw the light. You stood your ground while you were suffering from an enormous amount of pressure. ³³ Sometimes you were exposed to insults and abuse in public. Other times you became partners with those who were treated that way. ³⁴ You even showed sympathy toward people in prison and accepted the confiscation of your possessions with joy, since you knew that you had better and lasting possessions. ³⁵ So don't throw away your confidence—it brings a great reward. ³⁶ You need to endure so that you can receive the promises after you do God's will.

³⁷ In a little while longer, the one who is coming will come and won't delay;

³⁸ but my righteous one will live by faith, and my whole being won't be pleased with anyone who shrinks back. ³⁹ But we aren't the sort of people who timidly draw back and end up being destroyed. We're the sort of people who have faith so that our whole beings are preserved.

11 Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see.

Standing Your Ground

The holiday season is not always quite so holly and jolly for everyone especially those who have experienced loss and are coping with grief.

This time of year, with Thanksgiving, then Christmas and New Year's on the heels of each other, has a way of heightening a sense of grief for many with missing faces at family gatherings during a time that is supposed to be joyous and celebratory.

Grief is unimaginably palpable during the holidays. They bring people together who love one another. Memories are powerful, and while they can bring great joy, they can also bring great pain.

It may feel like "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" for others, but for those whose living rooms and family tables are missing members of the family cast of characters, it is most certainly not. Every season, every birthday, anniversary and Christmas is hard in its own way, for the rest of our lives.

Grief becomes a regular part of life for many that have lost loved ones. What is important, especially around the holidays when those feelings of grief can become even more prominent, is to remember that coping with loss is a marathon, not a sprint, and every day looks different.

A counselor friend of mine, Rev. Dr Jonathan Carrol wrote, “Understanding, accepting, and learning to love our grief is a vital part of living in the absence of someone we have lost. Grief is the tax we pay for having loved someone; it is the where all the love goes now that our beloved is gone”. Yes, learning to love our grief.

The scriptures say, “Remember the earlier days, after you saw the light. You stood your ground while you were suffering...” Stand your ground. You are not forsaken. You are not alone.

I lit a candle for my sister-in-law who so badly wants to be home for Christmas from the rehab center, but will not be able to. And I lit a candle for my wife who just celebrated 9 years cancer free. Yes, we’ve been through dark times.

We, as the community of faith, can provide support to each other in a culture that shies away from grief and many other negatively associated emotions.

Helping grievers grieve, promoting a cultural understanding of grief, teaching people to support those who grieve, and continuing the conversation community wide in a grief-avoidant society is what the church is called to do.

Stand your ground. Grief is not a problem to be fixed, but is an emotional reality that must be experienced, and that despite what others might say, being kind, being gentle and being patient with one’s self in the midst of it is the most important and most sacred thing we can do.

For those who have a friend or loved one who might be experiencing grief this holiday season, it is important not to shy away and to let that person know they are remembered. Offering grief support has to be all about them. Show up for them. Be quiet and listen to them. Love them in this way.

Grief has no timeline, so check in long after the death has passed – you will never be reminding someone of their loss by bringing up their loved one – you will be reminding them that you haven’t forgotten, and that means the world. Stand your ground with each other and be present to each other as God is present in Christ to us.

Preached by Rev. David M. Montgomery
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