

By Rev. Metty Mesick, Hospital Chaplain

Loss that results from death is never easy. It always feels like the rest of the world moves on, while we are left without - without our loved ones. The void that we feel is known only to us. The word or joke left unspoken. The chair that sits empty. The family pet that looks for the one who is not ever coming home. The unfinished business that piles up on the kitchen counter or the dining room table. It is hard to find others who truly understand who and what it is that we have lost in those first moments of pain that come. And yet now, we are currently bound in this moment in history and in time where the world is both constantly moving on, yet held in a holding pattern. This complicates our grief. We are stuck in a liminal place, where it is both hard to say goodbye and to properly find closure; and yet, the fears of impending *possible* loss dog us at our every interaction with the outside world. Our community is shut down, held in as much of a holding pattern as we feel we are in our loss. This worldwide pandemic tells us we are both not alone in our loss, as thousands die every day to this terrible coronavirus as well as all the other reasons that humans die; and yet, we must stay alone, removed, separated by six feet or more as we grieve our very own personal losses. Please know that you are not alone in your loss. Please know that God feels every heart beat and the loss of every beating heart.

So I wish to offer a few ideas for how you can deal with loss, particularly if you experience a death of a loved one during these uncertain times, when funerals cannot be held as we once normally would.

1. Work with the pastor or funeral home to hold a Zoom funeral. You can include as many as you wish, to be able to come together virtually, in order to celebrate the life and legacy of the one who has gone on from us.
2. Call your loved ones, and accept the calls, emails, and texts from those who love you, and are trying to reach out to you. It can be difficult to press that button on your cell to accept the call, but in most cases, it will be a balm that you didn't realize that you needed. If you aren't getting the interaction you need, reach out, to the church, your pastor, your friends, and family to ask for just a few minutes to talk, to share what you're feeling, and to tell stories about your loved one that has passed on.
3. Journal - write out your thoughts and feelings. Write letters to your loved one, and tell them what is going on with you and about the daily things in your life. Feel free to keep these letters, or to even dispose of them, as a way to practice letting go.
4. Get creative - plant flowers, do a craft, or create a space inside your home or outside, to commemorate your loved one. You could put together a wall or poster or album of pictures of your loved one. Take time to think through what each picture means to you, reminiscing on each picture, and the stories that are associated with your loved one's life.
5. Play music or a video, make a special food, or locate a piece of clothing that brings happy memories of your loved one. Sometimes these positive links to our loved ones can help us feel farther from the loss and closer to the love.

It's most important to know that you are not alone in your loss. Please call the church, ask for a virtual or telephone visit from the pastor or from the congregational care providers. You do not need to suffer alone, or in silence. There are ways that we can reach out to you, and you to us that will bridge across this six-foot space between us.

Finally, remember to be gentle with yourself and the ones you love. It is okay if you don't have all the answers right now. You have gone through a loss that is unique to only you. It will take time for all your tears to dry, and that is perfectly normal; it is completely okay to take time to grieve and say goodbye.