THE MYTH OF CLOSURE

I have been challenged recently to think quite a bit about grief. I mentioned in worship last week that Friday, January 29th, was the third anniversary of the death of my dear friend Dr. Ferrol Sams (Sambo to all who knew him) in Fayetteville. Anniversaries of deaths, as some of us know, bring anew the pain of loss. In 1969, one of our circle of friends from North Cobb High School, Tommy Conrad, died at the age of nineteen. His father, living in Arkansas, died recently and one of Tommy’s cousins sent a copy of Mr. Conrad’s obituary to me. I shared it with a couple of friends, those who gathered at the Conrad home on the fateful day in June, 1969, and who made the trip to Arkansas for Tommy’s burial. We all learned that the tender spots are still very tender. For a day or so we were all teammates together again, eating pizza at Russo’s in Marietta again, singing in the “Warrior Chorus” again, and all anew came the tragic finality of Tommy’s death. I still miss Sambo, and I still miss Tommy. But I honestly, shouldn’t I be “over” both deaths by now?

Dr. Stephen Forman, at the City of Hope hospital/ research center/ medical school in California, published an article recently to help people like me deal with grief. “We often hear how important it is to gain closure—a way of tidying up to help us move on with our lives. The reality is that ‘closure’ is a myth….The wound of loss is (with us) forever….though not every day or with the same intensity. Recollection is sometimes provoked by a date, (or by) a sight, sound, aroma, melody, or place that evokes that missing person….No matter how much time has passed, memories remain.”

We should not attempt to close the memories of friends who are no longer with us, he said. Such attempts do not sustain the healing “or help in proceeding with life.” Those moments of memory are not about closure, but rather about “the fullness in each of our lives that came from our family, loved ones, and friends…”

Surely there are moments of remembrance for you, too. In the church we formalize those moments each year on All Saints Sunday when we recall those who have lived among us and are no longer here. But the little moments come along. Perhaps they bring a smile or a chuckle. Perhaps they bring a shortness of breath, perhaps a tear. I think we are to know that God is in the smile and the chuckle, the shortness and the tear. Memory is one of God’s good gifts. I am thankful, then, for those for whom I grieve and for their presence with me along the journey.
Three Little Words

You may recall that last week I was not only out of the office, but also out of the country. The Reverend Brian Smith and I were in El Salvador on a mission trip with our provisional clergy group. I had confessed in an earlier article that I was a bit fearful about this trip; after all El Salvador is supposedly the most violent country in the western hemisphere! My concern was primarily about the prolific gang activity; however, in reality I should have been more alarmed about the threat from mosquitoes carrying the Zika virus. While we had a wonderful trip encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ, co-laboring with them in building another United Methodist Church structure, and learning about an altogether different ministerial context, I was very grateful indeed to hear three lovely words, “Welcome to Atlanta!” upon touching down at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

What are the three words that speak comfort to you today? Perhaps it is the statement, “You are forgiven.” Certainly with Valentine’s Day approaching many will hear, “I love you.” With the season of Lent right around the corner, we turn our thoughts to the Passion of Jesus Christ, and are reminded of his last three words from the cross, “It is finished.” Now that I have experienced firsthand the needs of those in El Salvador, I think the most powerful three words I can pray are, “Thy kingdom come.”

Grace and peace,

Lori Ethridge

COMING UP AT MARIETTA FIRST

Join the Senior Adults for lunch on Wednesday, Feb 17 in the Reception Hall. We will hear jointly from eldercare attorney, Cindy Nelson, home health business owner, Lou Ann Thombley, and wealth manager, Steve Norris. The cost is $8. Please RSVP to Rev. Lori Ethridge at ext. 7835.

Celebration of the Negro Spiritual, directed by Dr. Oral Moses, will be performed at the Marietta Performing Arts Center at Marietta High School on Sunday, February 14 at 3 p.m. This is free and open to the public. To utilize the church transportation please RSVP to Rev. Lori Ethridge. We will depart at 2:20 p.m. from the Polk Street lot. (Rev. Lori Ethridge, ext. 7835)

Help restock the MFUMC food pantry during the month of February. Collection bins will be located at each elevator. For a list of items most needed, visit www.mariettafumc.org. (Forrest Cate, ext. 8906)

Contact Rev. Lori Ethridge, Minister to Senior Adults
Phone: 770-429-7800, ext. 7835 • E-mail: loriethridge@mariettafumc.org

Coffee and Chocolates for Valentine’s Day! The United Methodist Women will sell organic coffee and organic chocolate on this Sunday on the Bridge and at the Reception Desk.