When It Rains, It Pours

Acts 8:1-4

Dr. Frederick D. Haynes III
May 13, 2020
Lessons about grief from Michael Jordan:

• Grief can be a pernicious puppeteer.
• One disruptive loss can lead to other losses.
• Triggers bring to the surface unresolved pain.
• One can be on top of the world but painfully feel the absence of the loved one.
He identifies with Tupac.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tupac</th>
<th>Diddy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tupac in “Life Goes On”</td>
<td>Can't believe you ain't here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“But now that you’re gone, I’m in the zone”</td>
<td>Sometimes it's just hard for a “n-word” to wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinkin’ I don’t wanna die all alone, but now you gone”</td>
<td>It's just hard to just keep goin'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's like I feel empty inside without you bein' here”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is an era of massive disruption, death and depression. A symptom of such an era is grief.

- Eddie Glaude, Jr. wrote of the collective grief that we will experience as a nation. He states that in “A Grief Observed”, C.S. Lewis wrote, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.” That sense of fearful grief will be a persistent feature of our national politics moving forward. Americans will carry their dead into the voting booths. Their dead will shadow assessments of the words of politicians. They will hover over our choices about the future of America.
This is an era of massive disruption, death and depression. A symptom of such an era is grief.

- Black Grief in the age of Covid19 is magnified by the Black experience in America.
Acts 8 is the aftermath of murder.

Deacon Stephen had courageously spoken truth to power and it cost him his life. By way of introduction, we note the grief stricken response of the faith community.

• Great lamentation. Lamentation is wailing as accompanied with beating the breast. This is inconsolable grief. Emotional pain that won’t go away. They beat their breasts as a sign of sadness and sorrow.
Acts 8 is the aftermath of murder.

- They scatter as a result of persecution. Luke uses a rather colorful word that is here translated as “destroy.” In the literature where it appears, it is often used to describe a person torn up by wild animals, such as lions, wild pigs, leopards, and wolves. They don’t have the opportunity to just grieve because all hell breaks loose. Their grief is compounded by anxiety, disruption, displacement, fear. Christians are drug from their homes, imprisoned, and possibly even killed.
Acts 8 is the aftermath of murder.

• Bad religion is often complicit with necropolitics. “Saul approved of his execution.” For Saul, this is a righteous act. He is convinced that God approves of this. Dr. Renita Weems asserts “History would be far different if we did not tend to hear God most clearly when we think God is telling us exactly what we want to hear.”
They experienced surprising possibilities breaking through their painful sorrow.

- Saul is referred to as if the audience is familiar with Saul. Saul and his story are known by the audience. The same Saul who is complicit with the execution of Stephen is known as the Saul who became Paul in the next chapter. There is a next chapter. As devastating as things are right now, there is a next chapter.
They were pushed by persecution and pain into the plan and purpose Jesus proclaimed in Acts 1:8.

- In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the first disciples “You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be witnesses (martyrs) in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and all over the world...”.
- However, for the first 7 chapters they have limited their witness to Jerusalem.
- Their purpose was discovered in a package wrapped in pain.
They teach us about faith and grief.

- Their grief was expressed. Grief is expected and expressed.
- Grief was also resistance. Their mourning actually goes against Jewish custom, which disallows open lamentation and only permits silent mourning for a person who is stoned.
They teach us about faith and grief.

• Mama Till engages in resistance through grief being expressed.
Faith pivots with divine improvisation out of their comfort zone.

- Their comfort zone was no longer comfortable.
- Sorrow scattered them and they blossomed where they landed goodness.