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"...that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love..."
Colossians 2.2 (NIV)

Dear friends,

These summer days are filled with laughter and joy as families and friends reunite. What I have noticed is that they are also filled with grief – so palpable yet so difficult to define.

We want to be done with Covid and Covid protocols even as we hear news of the Delta variant.

We want to be done with masks but know that some of those in our midst have not been able to be vaccinated – some by choice, some by age, some by other medical conditions.

We want to put 2020 in the past, tucked in a box on the shelf of memories. All the while, family and friends are finally gathering to bury loved ones.

CDC guidelines change and we think we are in the clear. But, wait, worshipping communities and daycares have a different set of guidelines to follow. So confusion sets in as we continue to move forward while trying to keeping people safe.

Grief is a difficult emotion. Sometimes it is right there demanding to be experienced. Other times, it is right below the surface and we can't ignore it as it erupts into our everyday moments. Still other times, it is buried deep and surfaces in a totally unexpected way.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt defines grief overload as "what you feel when you experience too much loss all at once or in a relatively short period of time." (<https://bit.ly/3gXKUtl>)

Most of us, if honest, are in grief overload. And our grief comes out in ways we may not even recognize. We may be short tempered, overly tired, or defiant.

My friends, we are still running the race. Please be patient. Please take care of yourself. Please continue to love and encourage one another. We are all tired. We are all grieving.

But we are also a people of hope, love, grace and mercy. Jesus went away by himself to pray when he was tired. Jesus took time to weep when his friend died. If it was important for Jesus to rest and grieve, how much more so for us.

Let me also encourage you to help your people recognize and articulate the grief they are experiencing.

In her book, *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown describes vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure." How do we learn to be vulnerable while being a leader in a ministry setting? How do we teach our people how to be vulnerable? And how do we give permission and safe-space for people to simply be vulnerable?

I was visiting with a single person who shared that, during the Covid quarantine, they rarely left home. They shopped where they could do curb-side pickup. They worked from home. They worshipped online. They didn't have to talk to anyone except by text and email. Now they are afraid that they have lost the ability to be with people. It is easier to stay at home than to risk going out. It is easier to text than to think of a face-to-face conversation. It is safer to stay at home alone than to risk being vulnerable with others.

How do we share in someone's grief when they are living alone or afraid? How do we share someone's grief when, perhaps, we would rather be safe at home in our own little bubble? How do we share someone's grief when we are burdened by our own?

So, let me say it again: my friends, we are still running the race. Please be patient. Please take care of yourself. Please continue to love and encourage one another.

Our vision, as the Christian Education Network of the ELCA, is:

Building a community which equips, encourages, and empowers those engaged in lifelong faith formation in a changing world.

Please let us know how we might equip, encourage and empower you to fulfill the purpose to which God has call you. You are not in this alone. Thanks be to God!

Blessings and peace,
The Rev. Juli Lejman-Guy, President