

At some point in our lives, we experience loss, feeling as though we're in a hole of sadness, overwhelmed by grief. Maybe you can recall the first time you faced that pit of despair, such as the death of someone you loved—a family member, friend, or maybe a cherished pet. When we face loss, we find ways of coping with our emotions through the shedding of tears, conversations with friends, long walks of silence, or other rituals that help us heal. Funerals can provide a sense of closure as we say goodbye to a loved one, an event that helps us let go and trust that they remain in God's care.

When a pet dies, burying it in the backyard and offering a few memories or words of prayer can help with the loss. Even children at a young age can recognize this burial ritual as a helpful means of saying goodbye. There's something comforting in digging a hole and placing one's deceased pet in the ground, as young Tim realized as he shoveled a hole in his yard for a pet.

Little Tim was in the garden filling in a hole when his neighbor peered over the fence.

Interested in what the...youngster was up to, he politely asked, "What are you up to there, Tim?"

"My goldfish died," replied Tim tearfully without looking up, "and I've just buried him."

The neighbor was concerned. "That's an awfully big hole for a goldfish, isn't it?"

Tim patted down the last heap of earth, then replied, "That's because he's inside your stupid cat."<sup>1</sup>

The writer of Psalm 130 also knew about holes, but not for pets, for the author called out to God from the depths, from what felt like a well of despair, as though the bottom had fallen out of his life. The psalmist then seems to argue with God: "If you, GOD, kept records on wrongdoings, who would stand a chance?" The writer quickly answers his own question by saying: "As it turns out, forgiveness is your habit, and that's why you're worshiped."

The psalmist had waited a long time for a response of God, which is underscored by saying, "My life's on the line, waiting and watching till morning," a line repeated again, "waiting and watching till morning." The repeating of the line about waiting may echo our own feelings, for have you ever felt as

though it took God forever to respond to your despair as you cry out over and over again?

This type of psalm is called a lament, for it expresses sorrow and turmoil. A contemporary writer from the Philippines offered a lament in regard to modern issues of her nation:

How long, O Lord,  
 how long will the peasants remain landless  
 will the workers remain displaced  
 will the urban poor remain homeless  
 will the youth and students remain unchallenged  
 and unschooled  
 will the national minorities remain ostracized and  
 excluded  
 will the women remain doubly burdened  
 will the poor remain poor?...  
 How long, O Lord, how long?<sup>2</sup>

Although her words were set in the context of the Philippines, they also echo concerns in our own nation. Lament seems to be a universal language, for we all face struggles in life. I imagine you could recall a time in your life that was filled with lament, when it felt as though you were in a hole. Maybe your lament was a few years ago, or several months ago, or even more recently.

*Holy, Holy, Wholly*  
 March 26, 2023

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*Psalms 130*

When facing the struggles of life, we may experience the temptation of giving up, of getting stuck in our sadness and grief, possibly even feeling as though God has abandoned us, which reminds me of a story about the church reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Martin Luther once spent three days in a [deep] depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. “Who’s dead?” he asked her.

“God,” she replied.

Luther rebuked her, saying, “What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die.”

“Well,” she replied, “the way you’ve been acting I was sure He had!”<sup>3</sup>

When we find ourselves in these situations of despair, instead of getting stuck, we may rather want to quickly get out of the pit, to move beyond the pain, to avoid the suffering, but maybe being in a hole is what helps us connect to the Holy, as though suffering helps us love more deeply.

Writer Richard Rohr suggests that

In the practical order of life, if we have never loved deeply or suffered deeply, we are unable to

understand spiritual things at any depth. Any healthy and “true” religion is teaching you how to deal with suffering and how to deal with love...Even God has to use love and suffering to teach you all the lessons that really matter. They are [God’s] primary tools for human transformation.<sup>4</sup>

I don’t believe that God sends suffering to us in order to “teach us a lesson” filled with pain, but when we find ourselves in those natural holes of despair, it may feel as though the Holy One draws closer to us, teaching us, helping us become aware that God has been with us all along. Suffering can somehow heighten our sensitivity to God’s presence, opening our senses to experience God more deeply.

We begin the prayer Jesus taught his disciples by saying to God, “hallowed by your name.” *Hallowed*

means holy, honored, respected. Even in the chaos of life, we recognize that God is Holy, that God remains with us through everything we encounter.

In sensing God’s movement within our lives, we might find ourselves transformed into wholeness, or as Rohr explains,

You are reconfigured forever. Often this is the first birth of compassion, patience, and even love, as the heart is softened and tenderized through sadness, depression, and grief. These are privileged portals into depth and truth.<sup>5</sup>

Though the h-o-l-e-s of despair in our lives, we encounter the H-o-l-y One, and we ourselves become w-h-o-l-e. Our Holy God, who comes in our Holey despair, makes us Wholly engaged in life. Holy, Holey, Wholly.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 714). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #681.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Rose Joy Ruiz-Duremdes, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines, “A People’s Lamentation of Human Rights Day,” *Seeing Christ in Others*, comp. Geoffrey Duncan, United Church Publishing House, Etobicoke, Ont., Canada, 1998, p. 213-14.

<sup>3</sup> *Homiletics*, March 26, 2023.

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<sup>4</sup> Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ* (p. 207). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.