

When tragedy hit my life!

On 8 July 2012 my younger brother Mark had a tragic accident, was on life support and died. It was reported in the Herald over a couple of days.

One of the things that struck me the next day when I picked up the Herald again was that another family was also being ripped apart by tragedy and again the following day. This is life! Tragedy is a part of life ... we know that it is true – but we hope that it is not true for us.

Jesus tells us in John 16 that “*in this world you will have trouble*”. Life is full of trouble.

People say – ‘well this is not heaven and we’re just passing through’. But for me it’s not enough to say ‘we’re just passing through’ because tragedy brings with it deep sadness, aloneness, and an immediate lack of movement rather than a feeling of passing through.

Mark’s accident was a result of natural consequences – which I know God could have intervened in – but He allowed those consequences to take their natural course – as He often does. And I’m okay with that.

So I began asking God the following questions: what is Your purpose in this for me – because I don’t want to miss it? What is it You want to achieve in my life through all of this pain?

I spent time in what Joyce Rupp beautifully calls “grace-filled solitude” and I sensed the Lord saying 2 things:

1. The first thing was “*JUST TRUST ME*”. My immediate reply was “*But Lord I hate it when people say that – just trust God!*” And I sensed His answer: “*I’m not people. You can trust Me. I am trustworthy and this is not just a glib answer from Me – it is real*”. How could I argue with that!!
2. The second thing was “*PEACE BE WITH YOU*”. I recalled that this is what Jesus said to His disciples when He appeared to them after His death in John 20:19-21. He said it again when He reappeared again when Thomas was with the disciples in John 20:26. And in John 14:27 Jesus refers to “*His peace*”.

I knew from reading the surrounding verses that these were times of fear, uncertainty and confusion for the disciples. So I began meditating on those words: “*peace be with you*” and “*my peace I give you*” and I’d like to share 5 points that I came up with.

- A. Peace is a knowing that it is okay despite the fact that the situation looks tragic and feels painful. And it is okay because Jesus is in control – He knows the big picture – all I know is that Mark had a tragic accident and died.
- B. A tragic accident reminds us how fragile life can be. Thoughts centred on the fragility of life can cause feelings of fear and uncertainty but peace is the opposite of fear and uncertainty. So as I am reminded of the fragility of life and filled with His peace, I can embrace the preciousness of life rather than live in fear.
- C. Peace is about trust, reconciliation and acceptance amidst feelings of shock, tension, sadness and incompleteness. I say incompleteness because I feel that part of my body – like a limb – is missing. I guess that’s because he was my brother and we belong together.
- D. Peace is internal because I am a temple of the Holy Spirit. Peace is like a seed in me waiting to flourish.
- E. Peace is about not being alone! Grief can feel very lonely but peace reminds me I am not alone.

Now I would like to say that I am filled with God’s peace all the time but that is not true. Peace is the place I aspire to – but the reality is I’m not there. A few days ago I felt enveloped by a cloud of grief that was difficult to get out from underneath – but today the sun is shining and I do feel and know His peace. Grief brings pain sometimes and peace at other times.

I love Paul’s prayer in Philippians 4:4-7 (The Message) and have personalised it as follows:

“Lord, help me to celebrate You all day, every day – I mean revel in You! Help me to make it as clear as I can to all I meet that I’m on their side, working with them and not against them. Help me see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

Help me not to fret or worry but instead of worrying, pray. Let my petitions and praises shape my worries into prayers, letting You know my concerns.

May a sense of Your wholeness, everything coming together for good, come and settle me down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the centre of my life.”