

Sunday Column: Lifting One Another in Joy and Grief

Week 4 – The Body of Christ and Resurrection Hope

Faith Behind Our Vision (Theological Themes)

- *Belonging to one another as members of Christ's body – Ecclesiology*
- *(Bringing grief and unanswered questions before God – Lament)*
- *Trusting in God's promise of life and renewal – Resurrection hope*

“Together, we lift one another in joy and in grief, cultivating hope when the world feels unhopeful.”

The fourth sentence of our vision begins with “together.” That word reflects our Christian understanding that we belong to one another and need one another's care. Paul describes the church as the body of Christ, whose members have different gifts and depend on each other. When one member suffers, the others share that suffering; when one is honored, the others share that joy (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). What happens to one person matters to the rest of the community.

This belonging makes room for the changes in our lives. There are seasons when we have time and energy to offer generously, and seasons when getting through the day takes most of our strength. Illness, grief, or family responsibilities can change what we are able to do. Our place in the body of Christ continues through those changes. Receiving care belongs within Christian life just as giving it does.

We practice this connection when we share prayers and celebrations in worship. In the same morning, we may hear about a visit with family, a medical concern, and the death of someone deeply loved. These experiences sit beside one another in our prayer. We do not all arrive at worship feeling the same way, and our gathering gives us an opportunity to become attentive to someone else's life.

Paul's invitation to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep asks us to enter that attention with care (Romans 12:15). Joy deserves more than a passing acknowledgment. Someone may have waited a long time for the good news they share. Taking time to listen and celebrate allows their happiness to become part of our common life, even while another person among us is grieving.

Our lives also have an annual rhythm of remembering. Birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays bring occasions for joy. Grief has its anniversaries, too. A particular month may bring back memories of someone we have lost or of a difficult change in our lives. Others may see an ordinary week on the calendar while we feel its approach long before it arrives.

Is there a month or season that makes you slow down and remember? How much of that story is known by the people close to you, including those with whom you worship and pray? Sometimes we hope someone will remember without being reminded. Sometimes we hesitate to speak because the loss happened years ago, or because we have mentioned it before. Yet the passing of another year does not make that person less important to us.

I wonder whether our time of Prayers and Celebrations has helped you share those moments with the people gathered for worship. It can be a place to say, “This is a difficult week for me,” or “I'm remembering someone today.” You do not have to tell the whole story. Naming what you are carrying can give others a way to reach toward you.

Still, care cannot depend entirely on someone finding the courage to speak aloud. We can notice when a person has been absent, remember a date they have shared, or ask privately how they are doing. We can leave room for an honest answer without pressing them to say more than they wish.

And when it is your turn to need care, how might you reach out? It may be as simple as asking someone to call during a difficult week, sit with you, or remember a loved one in prayer. You are welcome to tell me or someone you trust what would help. Some things are easier to share in a quiet conversation than during worship.

“We lift one another” includes learning how each person wants to be cared for. Some welcome company; others need space with the assurance that they have not been forgotten. Knowing these rhythms helps our care become more personal.

Christian faith gives us language for sorrow through *lament*. In the Psalms, people bring their distress directly to God, asking how long suffering will continue and why God seems absent (Psalm 13:1-2). These prayers belong in Scripture, and they belong in our worship. We can bring frustration and unanswered questions before God without first making sense of them. Grief remains welcome even when it lasts longer than others expected.

Our care also takes practical form in the annual rhythm of the food pantry. From November through April, hot meals are part of the Girdwood Food Pantry’s work. Through Terry Sherwood’s efforts and the work of volunteers from the church and wider community, that response continues across the season. A meal cannot resolve every difficulty someone faces, but it can meet a real need that day. Returning to the work makes care dependable.

I hear that steady practice in the phrase “cultivating hope.” Hope can become difficult to imagine when hardship continues or the news brings another account of suffering. We may have no answer to when circumstances will improve. Yet we can keep a promise, offer food, or remain in contact with someone who feels forgotten. These actions give a person something concrete to depend on.

Christian hope rests in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. First Peter speaks of a living hope through his resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). We trust that suffering and death do not have the final word. The theological word *eschatology* concerns God’s promised future, when God’s work of healing and renewal reaches its fulfillment. That promise gives us reason to continue caring for a world whose wounds remain real.

There will still be days when someone cannot feel hopeful. Our vision’s word “together” matters especially then. We can continue praying when a person has no words left. Paul writes that the Spirit helps us in our weakness when we do not know how to pray (Romans 8:26). We, too, receive help as we seek to care for one another.

When we finish sharing prayers and celebrations on Sunday, I hope we will carry someone’s words into the week. We might ask again about the good news or remember an approaching anniversary. A simple message—“I remember this is a difficult time for you. Would you like some company?”—can let someone know that what they shared has stayed with us. Our prayer continues through that attention.