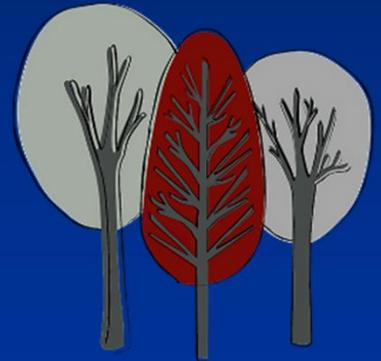


Dementia Through A Spiritual Lens

7. Dementia and Christian Discipleship

8. Dementia, Grieving, and Death



Kenneth L. Carder



Ministry
with the
Forgotten

Dementia through
a Spiritual Lens

Primary Reference

- **Ministry With The Forgotten: Dementia Through A Spiritual Lens**, Kenneth L. Carder. 2019, Abingdon Press, ISBN 978-1-5018-8024-7.





Kenneth Carder

- Served as a pastor of United Methodist local congregations in Virginia and Tennessee for 35 years.
- **1992 to 2004:** Bishop in the United Methodist Church.
- **2004 to 2009:** Served on the faculty of Duke Divinity School.
- **Nov 2009:** his wife was diagnosed with frontotemporal **dementia**.
- He became his wife's primary caregiver.
- As her disease progressed over the next 10 years, she eventually required institutional care at a memory care facility.
- He served as a chaplain at the memory care facility where his wife lived for 18 months. ■

Outline

■ **November 29:**

- 1. Dementia Through a Medical Lens
- 2. Dementia: Mind, Memory, and God

■ **December 6:**

- 3. Dementia and God's Nature and Action
- 4. Dementia and the God Who Is Incarnate

■ **December 13:**

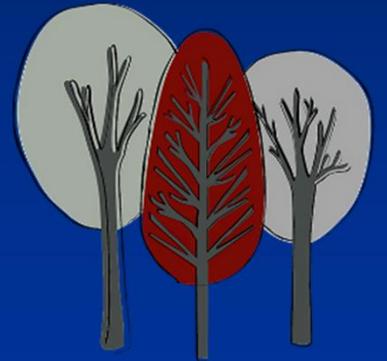
- 5. Dementia and the Meaning of Personhood
- 6. Dementia and the Meaning and Source of Salvation

■ **December 20:**

- 7. Dementia and Christian Discipleship
- 8. Dementia, Grieving, and Death ■

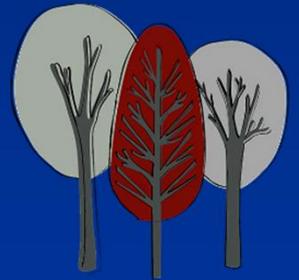
- PowerPoint presentations from the series can be downloaded from:

www.StJohnAdultEd.Org/dementia.htm



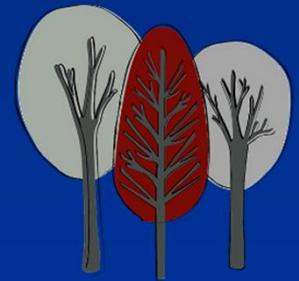
ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Dementia and Christian Discipleship



ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Dementia and Christian Discipleship: Introduction



Introduction

- Each week Bishop Carter led a worship with 30 to 40 people, most of whom were in the mid-stages of **dementia**.
- Most of them had been *participants* in churches for six or seven decades.
- They had:
 - known the creeds,
 - participated in rituals and liturgies,
 - faithfully tried to fulfill their baptismal and membership vows to support the church.
- They had exhibited the marks of Christian **discipleship**.

Introduction

- But now for those 30 to 40 people in the mid-stages of **dementia**:
 - Church participation has fallen by the wayside,
 - Creeds have been erased from their understanding,
 - For some, Jesus and God are meaningless concepts,
 - Even behavior boundaries have weakened:
 - a straight-laced pastor now uses profanity,
 - a deaconess makes indiscriminate sexual overtures.

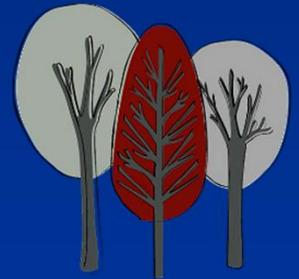
Introduction

- A pastor and chaplain with **dementia** laments, “I’m not any good to anybody! I can’t do anything anymore!” Instead of *helping* others, he is now *dependent* on others.
- He is but one of many whose Christian **discipleship** and **vocation** seem in *peril* as their intellectual and language capacities fade.
- Congregations largely view people with **dementia** as:
 - *recipients* of ministries, *not participants* in ministries,
 - *objects* of mission, *not contributors* to mission.
- They are relegated to the “inactive roll,” with no expectations to contribute.

Questions

- Are people with **dementia** only *emeriti* Christian disciples?
- Can they *follow* a Jesus whom they have *forgotten*?
- Do they have a Christian **vocation**, a calling?
- How can their **discipleship** and **vocation** be nurtured, and their gifts celebrated and utilized for the church's mission?

Dementia and Christian Discipleship: The Meaning of Christian Discipleship



Meaning of Christian Discipleship

- Some of the responses of a class of seminary students to the question, **“What does it mean to be a Christian disciple?”**:
 - To believe in the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds,
 - To accept Jesus as Lord and Savior,
 - To participate in the life and mission of the church,
 - To trust in God’s mighty acts of salvation, supremely in Jesus Christ,
- But all of these imply:
 - intellectual understanding,
 - conscious action or decision.

Hidden Aspects of Discipleship

- Is there a more *fundamental* answer to “**What does it mean to be a Christian disciple?**” one that can include those **dementia**?
- John Swinton writes, “**Dementia** does not affect **discipleship** or humanness; it reveals ‘hidden’ aspects of both.”
- Viewing **discipleship** through the lens of **dementia** can uncover “hidden” aspects of **discipleship**.

Christian Formation

- A **disciple** means a:
 - “follower,”
 - “student,” or
 - “apprentice” of a mentor.
- Jesus is called “rabbi,” or teacher, and his **disciples** learn about and from him.
- Christian education tries to *teach* and *form* people to be **disciples** of Jesus Christ.

Christian Formation

- Theological education prioritizes *intellectual* understanding of Christian:
 - doctrines,
 - history, and
 - tradition.
- Christian **discipleship**, however, also involves *formation* as well as such education.

Christian Formation

- Much of our *formation* occurs *unconsciously*.
- We are formed by:
 - relationships, experiences, practices within *community*, and
 - the ethos, the prevailing spirit, the character of our community's *culture*.
- Christian *formation* is “caught” as well as “taught.”

Christian Formation

- One pastoral theologian writes: “**Christian learning begins *before* we think about it and, by implication, it continues *after* we have ceased to think about it.**”
- Another writes, “[**Christian education**] is a holistic endeavor that involves the *whole* person, including our bodies, in a process of *formation* that aims our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world — all *before* we ever start thinking about it.”

Christian Formation

- Our “**memory**” is more *comprehensive* than the *conscious* recollection of events and facts.
- “**Memory**” is also *formed* by practices and experiences of which we are cognitively *unaware*.
- People with **dementia** *embody* behaviors and responses that reflect those past practices and experiences of which they were cognitively unawareness.
- Such “*embedded*” practices and behaviors can emerge in the actions and responses of those with **dementia**.
- They can “know” and “remember” in ways *outside conscience* recollection.

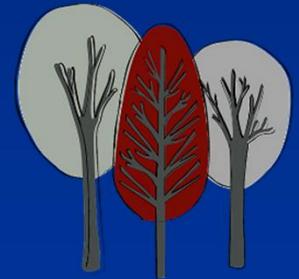
Broadening the Definition of Discipleship

- **Dementia** forces us to broaden the scope of **discipleship** *beyond* conscious loyalty to abstract creeds and doctrines.
- People with **dementia** can still “know” and “remember” in ways *outside conscience awareness*, through their “embedded” practices and behaviors.

Broadening the Definition of Discipleship

- **Love** is the most *fundamental* reality embodied in **Jesus** the Christ and in his **disciples**.
- **Love** is *not* the abstract *knowledge* of the creeds and doctrines.
- **Love** is a *way of being*, expressed in the conscious – and *unconscious* – dynamic of giving and receiving **love**.

Dementia and Christian Discipleship: The Dance of Love: Essence of Christian Discipleship



The *Shema*

- The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament both declare that **love** for God and neighbor *summarizes* God's expectations and goal for humanity.
- The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) is at the heart of Jewish daily prayer: **"Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."**
- When asked to identify the greatest commandment, **Jesus** answered with the *Shema*, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** Then he added a commandment from Leviticus 19:18b, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Matt 22:37-39).

The Greatest Commandment

- **Jesus** not only taught *about love*, but *was* the **incarnation** of divine love.
- His final commandment to his **disciples** is this: “**Love one another as I have loved you**” (John 15:12).
- Paul:
 - **love** is the ultimate gift and surpasses all other capacities, including knowledge and language (1 Cor 13).
 - nothing in all creation, including **dementia**, can separate us from God’s **love** (Rom 8:38-39)
- 1 John: “**God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them**” (4:16b).

Love at the Core of Discipleship

- The **love** at the core of **discipleship** is a covenantal commitment to seek the *well-being* of the Other with patience, humility, kindness, and perseverance.
- It is *more* than a sentiment: it involves *acts* of forgiveness, healing, justice, and advocacy.
- It also involves:
 - an acceptance of our *dependency*,
 - acknowledgment of our *limitations*,
 - a willingness to *receive* the gifts of others.

The Dance of Love

- The essence of Christian **discipleship** is this: participation in the giving and receiving of **love**.
- **Love** is defined by the **love** in the intimate relationship *within* the triune God, a dynamic *dance* of:
 - creating,
 - redeeming, and
 - sustaining.
- The *dance* moves with the unfolding drama of life's transitions and challenges, always:
 - *giving and receiving,*
 - *holding on and letting go.*

The Dance of Love

- Christian **discipleship**, then, consists of our *participation* in the triune God's *dance* of **love**, *whatever* our status or capacity.
- We are *part* of God's drama, or *dance*, of **love**!
- Identifying and fulfilling our *part* in that *dance* is the essence of Christian **discipleship**.
- Our specific *roles* will *change* with our circumstances:
 - Sometimes we take the “lead” in the *dance*; other times we are dependent.
 - At times, we may perform “solo”,
 - During other occasions, we may passively *receive* the gifts of others.

The Dance of Love

- Before she developed **dementia**, the Bishop's wife's role in the *dance* of **love** – in Christian **discipleship** – included teaching Sunday school and serving on Outreach projects.
- Now her *role* is largely that of *receiving* the expressions of **love** from those around her.
- As she *receives* expressions of **love**:
 - her husband's **love** grows,
 - the **love** in the world grows,
 - the triune God's *dance* of **love** expands.

The Dance of Love

- The circle of the *dance* widens further as:
 - Caregivers skillfully, tenderly, and patiently care for the needs of another,
 - Neighbors stop in to lend support,
 - A couple from church brings in a meal.

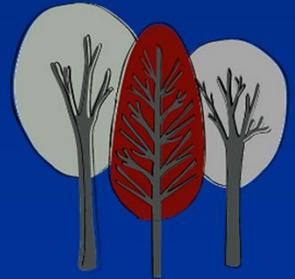
We Love By Faith

- There may be a *temptation* to assume that our acts of **love** for those with **dementia** don't really matter: **“After all, she doesn't even know I'm here!”**
- Sometimes the acts of **love** are reciprocated with *visible responses*. At other times, there is *no visible response*.
- But if our **love** is a participation in God's **love**, the *full response* is always *beyond* the visible or measurable.
- We **love** by faith: we *trust* that deep within the **beloved**, and in God's economy, our **love** makes a difference.

We Love By Faith

- The caregiver's **discipleship** amid **dementia** is often *challenging*.
- Our expressions of **love** may *not* be received with generosity or gratitude.
 - Response may appear to be the *opposite* of Christian **discipleship**: anger, hostility, violence, apathy, expressions of hate and disdain.
- Such *difficult* behaviors should be viewed as *manifestations* of the underlying *disease* rather than *intentional* responses to us.
- **Discipleship**, sharing in the *dance* of **love**, can require a lot of improvisation, discipline, and patience.

Dementia and Christian Discipleship: Discipleship as Communal



Discipleship as Communal

- **Discipleship** involves *community*.
- It is the *community* that engages in the *dance* of the triune God.
- The triune God's *dance* of **love** is a communal *dance* of:
 - mutual support,
 - giving and receiving,
 - leading and following.
- Paul: we are to “**bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ**” (Gal 6:2).

Our Mutual Dependency

- “I don’t want to be a *burden*” is a common dread in our society where personal autonomy is all important
- One of the “hidden” aspects of **discipleship** exposed by **dementia** is our *mutual dependency*, our need of one another.
- To be human is to be a *burden*!

Our Mutual Dependency

- Psychiatrist/theologian Warren Kinghorn: “The remarkable thing about human life is not that humans are frequently a *burden* to each other, but that bearing each other’s *burdens* is simply what humans do. It is care and relationship, *not* isolation and individualism, which are normative in human life. So, while it is true that caring for people with **dementia** (or supporting the caregivers of people with **dementia**) can be *burdensome*, it is also true that in these seasons the person needing care becomes *more*, not less, paradigmatically human.”

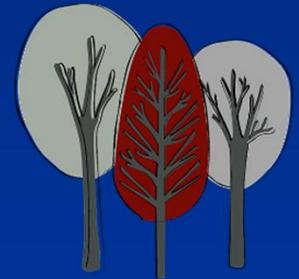
Our Mutual Dependency

- Christian **discipleship** involves:
 - *bearing one another's burdens, and*
 - *permitting others to help bear our burdens.*
- That's the *dance* of **love**!

Our Mutual Dependency

- It also means the *community* worships, believes, and serves *for* the disabled **disciple** whose impairments prevent him or her from participating in some of the expressions of **discipleship**:
 - When persons with **dementia** can no longer recite the Apostles' Creed, the *community* recites it for them.
 - When they cannot read the printed prayer, the *community* prays it for them.
 - When serving on committees or mission projects exceeds their abilities, *others* in the *community* serve on their behalf.

Dementia and Christian Discipleship: Dementia as Vocation



Our Christian Vocation

- Our **vocation** as Christians is to be:
 - recipients and **mediators** of God's salvation,
 - **participants** in the triune God's holy *dance* of **love**, compassion, and justice.

The Body of Christ

- Our **vocational** calling as Christians takes place:
 - within our own unique circumstances, and
 - within a particular *community*.
- *Each* member of the *community* plays a significant role.
- The Apostle Paul's description of the *community* as a “**body**,” with *each* part serving an important, *indispensable* function is noteworthy (1 Cor 12).
- Paul: “**But God has so arranged the body, giving the *greater* honor to the inferior member**” (1 Cor 12:24b).

The Body of Christ

- The “weaker” or “less respectable members.” are *indispensable* members of the **Body of Christ**, and are given *greater honor*.
- God has *chosen* the “weak,” the “foolish,” and the “despised” as **mediators** of God’s power, wisdom, and reconciliation.
- Jean Vanier (founder of L'Arche): “**In some mysterious way, they [people with disabilities] are calling to me, to us all, to change, ... When we meet people with disabilities and reveal to them through our eyes and ears and words that they are precious, they are changed. But we too are changed. We are led to God.**”

Caregiving as Sacred Vocation

- Caregiving is a sacred **vocation**!
- Caregiving is the archetype of Christian **discipleship**.
- **Jesus** defined **discipleship** as *servanthood* (Matt 20:24-28).
 - The model is Jesus washing the feet of the **disciples** and calling the **disciples** into a life of humble service (John 13:1-20).
- Caregivers of the severely disabled are the epitome of *self-emptying* service:
 - entering the most vulnerable areas of a person's life and
 - performing the most intimate and unglamorous of services.

Caregiving as Sacred Vocation

- In entering that world of total vulnerability, a unique bond of intimacy can develop:
- Some of Bishop Carter's most profound moments of *connection* with his wife suffering from **dementia** came while:
 - brushing her teeth,
 - grooming her hair, or
 - feeding her favorite ice cream.
- In the dynamic of *giving* and *receiving*:
 - the bond between them grew, and
 - he could sense a transcendent presence.
- And his wife's acceptance of his aid, her occasional smile or whispered "thank you," were expressions of *her* **discipleship**.

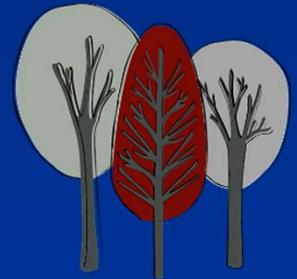
The Discipleship of Those With Dementia

- Persons in the severe stages of **dementia** fulfill their **discipleship** in simply *being* and *receiving* the **love** of others.
- Their *receiving* of care:
 - *expands* the caregivers' capacity to **love** without reciprocity,
 - *enables* growth in patience and kindness,
 - *calls forth* gentleness and attentiveness,
 - *facilitates* the *presence* of God in “the least of these.”

The Discipleship of Those With Dementia

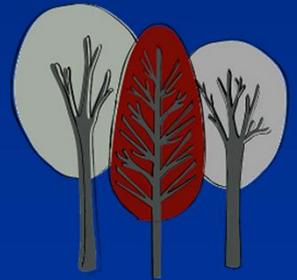
- Those with severe **dementia**:
 - are *means* of **grace**, giving God's *presence* and power to those who choose to be *present* with them;
 - teach us what it means to be a person made in the divine image and **loved** by God,
 - enable us to *grow* more fully in **love** for God and neighbor,
 - woo us to **love** one another as Christ **loves** us.

Dementia, Grieving, and Death



ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: Introduction



Introduction

- Grief is “the constant yet hidden companion of Alzheimer’s disease and related **dementias**.”
- The Bishop describes his acute awareness of his own **grief** as spouse and caregiver:
 - “I’m losing her a brain cell at a time,”
 - “It is as though a brilliant, multicolored light is gradually fading into an encroaching darkness.
 - There are short periods of stability with only subtle changes, allowing time for adjustment to the losses, then inexplicably the rate of decline accelerates, and the dramatic losses surface more grief.”
 - “The radiant light grows dimmer and dimmer, with occasional, fleeting flickers of brightness.”

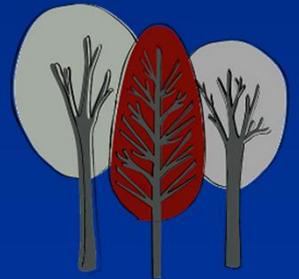
Introduction

- His wife's personal **grieving** over her **dementia** becomes less identifiable as her ability to perceive and articulate thoughts and feelings disintegrated.
- Signs of **grief** and sadness occasionally emerge, sometimes openly, other times subtly:
 - Sorrow in her eyes, a whimper in grieving tones.
- But is she aware of her losses, since only the *present* moment seems real?
 - Do the tears flow from mourning, or is there another explanation?

Questions

- How are we to understand the **grief** of persons with **dementia**?
- How does the **grief** vary from stage to stage?
- How can we aid in the process?
- What about the **grief** of caregivers?
- What are sources of hope and comfort from the Christian faith?

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: Grief of the Person with Dementia



Grief of the Person with Dementia

- During the *early* stages of dementia, the **grief** of the person with **dementia** can be visibly expressed: shock, denial, anger, and guilt.
- For example, the Bishop's wife's:
 - *anger* and *denial* at failing the exam for renewal of her driver's license.
 - *frustration* at being unable to dress herself,
 - *tears* when she realized she couldn't recall a grandchild's name,
 - *anger* at perceived shunning by friends,
 - *exasperation* at the inability to find words or comprehend words,
 - *defensiveness* when offered help with a task she can no longer complete.
- Each *lost* capacity is accompanied by **grief**.

Grief of the Person with Dementia

- As the disease *advanced*, her ability to comprehend and reflect on the losses faded, as did her capability to express her feelings verbally.
- Her **grief** seemed to go *underground*, erupting in behaviors and expressions *unrelated* to specific incidents or losses.
- She became combative and hostile for no apparent reason, as though life itself was against her, stripping away everything she valued.

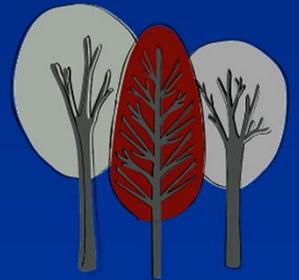
Grief of the Person with Dementia

- Restlessness, withdrawal, searching, crying, waning appetite, and a forlorn look in her eyes were among the outward signs of *underlying* **grief**.
- **“I want to go home”** became a frequent plea – when they were at home.
- “Home” was more a feeling, an emotion, than a place; a longing for life *as it once was*, for a sense of security, connectedness, belonging, comfort.

Grief of the Person with Dementia

- *Attentiveness* to the feelings *beneath* the behaviors is the appropriate response to the **grief** of the person with **dementia**.
- A reassuring *presence* is the most helpful *counter* to their **grief**:
 - Entering the person's world with empathy and compassion,
 - gently mourning with him or her.
- The great tragedy is that the *difficult* behaviors emerging from the **grief** often drive people away, precisely at the time their *presence* is most *needed*.

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: The Grieving Caregiver



The Grieving Caregiver

- The **grief** of the caregiver is like a constant *companion*.
- Sometimes the *companion* keeps a manageable distance; other times, it is like a violent intruder.
- Often it is like a cumulus cloud floating silently and unobtrusively nearby; other times, is a thunderbolt followed by a storm of sobbing.
- The *lament* of the psalmist surfaces throughout the journey: “**My tears have been my food day and night**” (Ps 42:3a).

Ambiguous Loss

- Pauline Boss (a professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota), describes the **grief** of **loved** ones of people with **dementia** as **ambiguous loss**.
- **Ambiguous Loss** is “a loss that is unclear; it has no resolution, no closure.”
- The person with **dementia** is both:
 - *present and absent,*
 - *gone but still there,*
 - *beside you but far away.*
- Boss: “**With dementia, absence and presence coexist. . . . When someone you love has dementia, the task is to increase your tolerance for the stress of ambiguity.**”

Ambiguous Loss

- **Ambiguous loss** makes the caregiver's **grief** particularly confusing and lonely.
- It is a roller coaster of conflicting emotions:
 - *holding on and letting go,*
 - *yearning for an end to the anguish while resisting the final goodbye.*

Disenfranchised Grief

- The **ambiguous loss** accompanying **dementia** contributes to a form of **grief** Kenneth Doka identifies as **disenfranchised grief**: “losses that are not appreciated by others.”
- Doka writes: “**The individual has no perceived ‘right’ to mourn; the loss is not openly acknowledged or socially sanctioned and publicly shared. Others simply do not understand why this loss is mourned and may fail to validate and support the grief.**”
- Society fails to acknowledge that the “long goodbye” is a legitimate **grief** process, thereby denying those on the journey support.

Layered and Multifaceted Grief

- Caregiver **grief** is layered and multifaceted.
- The Caregiver **grieves**:
 - for the losses experienced by the one with dementia,
 - their own personal losses.
- The uncertainty, fear and yet anticipation of the journey's end adds another layer of ambiguity and **grief**.

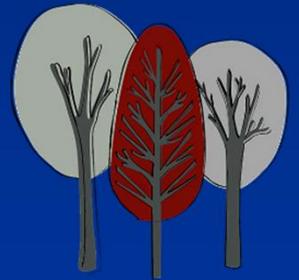
Layered and Multifaceted Grief

- The nature of the *past relationships* affects the **grieving**.
- Spousal **grieving** is a continuous process of:
 - *letting go* of the person who *was*, and,
 - *learning to love* the person who *is*,
 - while at the same time *anticipating* the final separation of death.
- Families characterized by open communication and mutual support can **grieve** with solidarity.
 - But when there is a history of tension and alienation, the **dementia** will likely intensify the family stresses and complicate the **grieving**.

Layered and Multifaceted Grief

- The decision to place a **loved** one in a facility intensifies and complicates **grieving**:
 - *guilt* that you have failed and abandoned the person with dementia,
 - *anger* at real and perceived neglect at the institution,
 - *frustration* with systemic institutional problems,
 - *loneliness* at the absence of the person with dementia.
- It is largely **disenfranchised** grief: few people understand the trauma involved in admitting a **loved** one to an institution:
 - “**You must feel relieved,**” a neighbor told the Bishop after he had admitted his wife to a Memory Care Facility.
 - On the contrary, he felt devastated!

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: Grieving the Final Goodbye



Grieving the Final Goodbye

- The death of the person with **dementia** changes the focus of the **grief**.
- As with other phases of the journey, the **grieving** is individualized and multifaceted.
- Some people experience a *liberating* loss, feelings of *relief* and *emancipation*:
 - the caregiving responsibilities and suffering by both the patient and family have ended.
- Others may **grieve** the *loss* of the caregiving role and experience a sense of meaninglessness and lack of purpose.

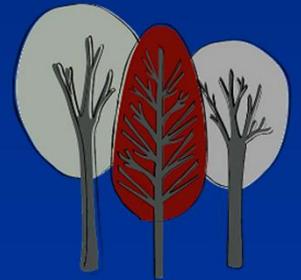
Grieving the Final Goodbye

- *Guilt* is a common component of all **grief**, but it may be especially intense upon the death of a family member with **dementia**:
 - *guilt* over times when more patience and empathy could have been shown, when *difficult* behaviors could have been better tolerated;
 - *guilt* for institutional placement;
 - *guilt* for failing to provide more assistance;
 - *guilt* for not visiting more often;
 - *guilt* over having feelings of relief.

Grieving the Final Goodbye

- The **grief** at the death of the **loved** one is sometimes a **disenfranchised** grief, or minimized by others who assume that the **grieving** has already taken place.
- Intended statements of support may complicate the process, failing to acknowledge its complexity:
 - “This must be a blessing,”
 - “You must feel relieved.”

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: Tasks of Grieving



Tasks of Grieving

- Psychologist J. William Worden classifies four tasks of mourning:
 - (1) *Accept* the reality of the loss.
 - (2) *Work through* the pain of **grief**.
 - (3) *Adjust* to an environment in which the **loved** one is missing.
 - (4) *Find* an enduring connection with the person while *moving forward* with a new life.

(1) Accept the Reality of the Loss

- Accepting the reality of the losses occurring throughout the journey with **dementia** is an *ongoing* challenge for *both* the person with **dementia** and their caregiver.
- The *incremental* and often *subtle* nature of the losses makes *denial* possible.
- However, as the disease progresses, the losses can *no longer* be denied

(2) Work Through the Pain of Grief

- Rituals exist to mark the **grief** of the *final* loss, but *no* rituals exist for marking the *gradual, more subtle* losses of **dementia**.
- A practice the Bishop found helpful in both in accepting the reality, and working through the pain of **grief** was the use of **lament**.
- After his wife experienced a specific loss, he wrote a prayer to express his **grief**, sadness, even anger.
 - Following the **lament**, the prayer could turn into **thanksgiving** for having previously been the beneficiary of the *gift* of what had been lost.

(2) Work Through the Pain of Grief

- Expressing one's pain within a supportive *community* can also help.
- Participation in support groups can also counters the sense of being alone:
 - Pain shared is pain diminished.

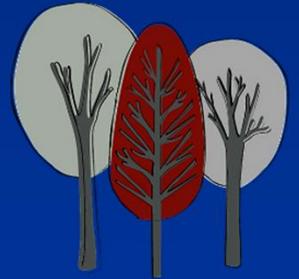
(3) Adjust To An Environment In Which The Loved One Is Missing.

- The **grief** accompanying **dementia** requires *persistent adjustment* to an environment in which the person is *different* rather than “*missing.*”
- The person you miss is still with you, but **dementia** is *ever altering* their behavior, abilities, and interactions.
- The losses from **dementia** are *open-ended*, and the *adjustments* to the new reality are *ongoing*.

(4) Find An Enduring Connection With The Person

- When death occurs, the bereaved remains *connected* with the deceased primarily through memories.
 - One *moves forward* by integrating those memories with new experiences, relationships, and activities.
- The **grieving** task for those *living* with **dementia** requires *continually*:
 - *finding new* ways of connecting with the changed person as he or she is *now*,
 - while *letting go* of *former* ways of connecting.

Dementia, Grieving, and Death: Love: The Bond That Endures



Love: The Bond That Endures

- At the core of the Christian tradition is the affirmation that **love** is the dominant and eternal reality in all creation.
- Human beings were created to participate in the triune God's *dance of love*.
- 1 John: **“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God”** (4:16b).
- Paul: nothing **“in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom 8:39).
- This theological lens broadens the perspective and provides comfort and hope.

Love

- **Love** is the *paradoxical* reality throughout **grief's** journey:
- **Love** *creates* the pain of **grief**,
 - and **love** *motivates* care and support amid the pain.
- **Love** *mourns* the cascading losses,
 - while *embracing* the inherent worth of **being** itself.

Love

- **Love** *laments* the shattering of the world as it *has been*
 - while *opening* pathways into the world as it *is becoming*.
- **Love** *struggles* to hold close the one who is drifting away, and
 - **love** yearns for his or her ultimate peace.
- **Love** *bewails* the powerlessness to prevent the inevitable, and
 - **love** dares to trust that “**weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning**” (Ps 30:5b).

Hope

- **Hope** lies in the final triumph of **love** over all that threatens God's intention for creation:
- All wounds will finally be healed.
- Death does not have the last word.
- *Intimations* of the *final* triumph of **love** abound for those who remain attentive as memories fade:
 - glimmers of coherence amid confusion,
 - flickers of joy within the surrounding gloom,
 - traces of harmony amidst dissonance.

Hope

- **Grief** is **love** mourning.
- In **loving** the vulnerable Other, we are participating in the transcendent **love** of the triune God.
- In such moments of **love**, the eternal can:
 - enter the transitory and
 - fill it with enduring promise and a peace that passes understanding.