**Closing Homily at Liturgy for those affected by Suicide**

**October 30th, 2019 at St John’s Episcopal Church**

**The Rev. Abigail W. Moon, Associate Rector**

“Lord of all gentleness, lord of all calm,  
Lord of contentment, whose presence is balm  
be there at our sleeping and give us we pray  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord at the end of the day.” (The Hymnal 482, verse 4)  
  
These are the words of our final hymn tonight, that we will sing together soon.

Before we do though, I want to share a little bit about the story behind the hymn, this hymn was written by Joyce Pelczek, under the pen name of Jan Struther. A woman born in 1901 and at age 28 these words flew off her pen onto paper, commissioned by the Dean of Westminster Abbey for his songs of praise songbook. Choosing a familiar Irish tune, this song soon became quite popular and familiar with its words of hope and the prayer of the heart.  
  
While Joyce, at the time of her writing this hymn attended church, she very much struggled with her faith and in the midst of her own life struggled with depression and many hardships, her first marriage dissolved In divorce after 23 years and she also battled breast cancer in the 1940s.

While she penned this hymn in her early adulthood, I believe that in her later years these words became a prayer heavy on her own heart as she battled the challenges of her own life and her own valley of the shadow of death.[[1]](#endnote-1)

We all seek love and community in the most challenging moments in our lives, and even in the darkest time- love is the antidote.  
  
We come here this evening each with a story of our own, of great sorrow, of great pain, of guilt or shame, we know the experience of loss due to suicide. That burden is exhausting and wearisome. Our hearts break under the anguish.  
  
And we come this evening also with the desire for healing, to be met with comfort and to share this evening with the hope that we might move forward and might be able to prevent someone else’s pain.  
  
With the rocks we hold in our hands, we are reminded of the weight of the love we have lost,

with the candles lit here in our presence we are reminded of the fragility of life and

with the flowers we are reminded that in the midst, new beginnings can occur.  
  
David Mosse expresses the pain of suicide with these words: “Love, it seems to me is why suicide is so difficult and so utterly painful. Love is that human condition which means that we none of us own ourselves, we have and are shared selves. Suicide is an act within this world of relatedness- often in response to unbearable emotional pain rather than the desire to abandon us- but which tears apart and contradicts what is essentially to our very being.”[[2]](#endnote-2)  
  
In the Judeo Christian tradition our scriptures remind us again and again of God’s being with us in the midst of our pain, isolation and struggles. I am reminded of Jacob and his wrestling with God that night before he reunites with his brother. [[3]](#endnote-3)

In the darkest of night, he wrestles with a man who is identified as an angel later in the story. The struggle continues all through the night, matched might with might, Jacob struggles, wrestles and doesn’t let go- and God is there in the midst of the struggle- never letting go, there in the midst wrestling with Jacob moment for moment.  
  
The night passes, morning breaks and Jacob begins the new day with a new name and will have a new walk, he will never walk in the same way again, his hip has been bruised changing his gait. His entire being has been changed by this experience- and he moves forward knowing and not forgetting but shaped by his struggles, by the darkness, realizing he is not alone in the midst of the darkness and that any struggle he might have can be met move by move by someone greater than he.  
  
My hope is that this evening you have heard words that resonate within you, speak to your brokenness, your despair and in turn - while we continue our journeys, we too are transformed- we walk shaped by our own struggles, and yet we walk, one step at a time, together as a community.  
  
My prayer is that we might be in the words of Jan Struther, swift to welcome, with arms to embrace.  
  
After the service I invite you to gather for conversation and light refreshments in Alfriend Hall, our Stephen Ministers[[4]](#endnote-4) and leaders of the Mourner’s Path[[5]](#endnote-5) will be present to listen to you and your story along with representatives from the agencies our speakers represent.

We welcome you here with arms open in a wide embrace, feel the community that is here to support you as we wrestle with the struggle of letting love win, even in the darkest moments of our nights.

SILENCE

*Then introduce the hymn and the opportunity to come forward and let go of your rock you have been holding during the service, to let go a little of the pain you might be carrying.*

1. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalmusic/3668150/The-story-behind-the-hymn.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/liturgy-people-affected-suicide> or in the book “Liturgy on the Edge” edited by Sam Wells. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The story can be found in Genesis 22 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.stephenministries.org/default.cfm> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.mournerspath.com/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)