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Nor would we be as blunt as the handyman who knocked on our door last week. He had done yardwork for us in the past and was looking for something to do.

He was not his usual upbeat self. I asked, “How are you doing?”

In an instant, tears came to his eyes and anger rose in his voice. “My daughter was murdered in February. Shot dead. My wife died of cancer in March. Tell me how could your loving God do that, huh?” Stepping back to the edge of the porch, he looked into the darkening evening sky and yelled, “C’mon on, if you’re so almighty God. Strike me dead. Lemme see whatcha got.”

We would never be so brazen. Instead, we would say, everything happens for a reason, which is a quasi-philosophical way of saying that one way or another God is responsible. If we could see things from God’s perspective, we would see that everything that happens, even every terrible thing that happens serves a higher purpose. Everything works out for the best – from God’s point of view. Paul says as much earlier in Romans.

Others say that God is not in the cause; God is in the rescue, the deliverance, the healing. Only in our case, maybe in yours, there would be no rescue. There could be no rescue, short of a flat-out, undeniable, out of this world, headline-making miracle.

Where is God in all this? Paul’s answer in our text is stunning. It reveals a spiritually sensitive side to Paul that some of us didn’t know he had. God, he said, is in the sigh, the heavy sigh that escapes our lips, the sigh that is too deep to be put into words. God is in the groan, the low moan that can’t be spoken.

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit.”

The Spirit intercedes for us, Paul said, lapsing into an anthropomorphism, but the Spirit’s intercession is not in a clearly articulated plea for deliverance or healing or peace or guidance; it rises to the heart of God from the place of our deepest hurt in the form of a sigh. The sigh is not a substitute for prayer – it is the prayer. The most profound form of prayer.

“Deep calls to deep,” the Psalmist said; the deep places in our souls calling out to the depth of God in a wordless prayer.

There is comfort in that. There is comfort in knowing that even when there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel, we have not been abandoned. We are not alone.

We are reminded of God’s comforting presence every time we sigh.

Helen Losse is a friend and a poet. One day she stopped by my office to give me a copy of her newly published book of poems. She called my attention to the last stanza of a poem, “Borrowed Memories,” which she said had been inspired by Rosie’s memorial service. I offer it as our benediction.

*And if we listen, the “deep is calling to the deep” –
Its mystical voiceover rising from under the still, still water,
Where melody, not words, whispers to us of unspeakable
Grace, and where, even in darkness, we are never alone.
(Helen Losse, The Centrifugal Eve, May, 2006)*

Go in peace. Amen.

“Where is God in all this?” a friend asked. That is the question, isn’t it? Some say that God is not in “all this” at all. God is, to paraphrase a well-known scripture, an ever-absent help in time of trouble. (Psalm 46:1) But for those of us to whom the presence of God is important, it’s a critical question.

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