

Living with and creating a spirituality of loss in a forensic context

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Background

This paper arises out of doctoral research. I carried out in 2 prisons where I was the chaplain.

I became interested in this area of work in prison in response to pastoral calls to break news of the death of a loved one, conduct funerals of prisoners' relatives, conduct prisoners' funerals, mark anniversaries, conduct Living with Loss courses, facilitate support groups and offer bereavement counselling.

However, I wanted to tease out why this had become the distinctive and sole work of the chaplain. Was it what was spiritual, religious, symbolic and/or what was theological about it? Could these values and these alone inform it and if so how and which areas of prisoner life could be enfranchised and liberated in addressing these painful parts of their lives? Had this work come to be part of the chaplain's ministry by default?

Living with and creating a spirituality of loss involved building a community that could come together for mutual support, understanding and education as well as shared experiences under the auspices of the chaplaincy department. This community applied the theory of 'disenfranchised grief' and theological reflection to its life and then was better equipped to understand and support different areas of loss in relation to their experiences, rather than with a notional element of bereavement support.

In order to uncover this I carried out some action research into two Living with Loss courses and support groups that I ran in a secure and open prison, which addressed different areas of loss in prisoners' lives. Initially the course addressed bereavement as the sole process of loss that prisoners faced. However as the research grew it became clear that the participants wanted to broaden their learning and felt that other areas of loss like anticipatory grief, living in a loss environment, results of long term imprisonment, and living with knowing that they had perpetrated a bereavement as part of their crime should be included. Quality of life issues were raised as prisoner talked about preparing for their own death in prison due to the length of their sentence.

The research data highlighted the importance of the spiritual and symbolic presence and role that the chaplain played in their journey in coming to terms with living with experiences of loss within in a harsh and disenfranchising environment. In the Living with Loss courses, prisoners regularly discussed closure, prayer and ritual, memory, acceptance and letting go as ways in which they could be supported. It became clear that as the research grew there needed to be some changes in practice, so a support group was formed, volunteers were recruited help run the programmes, faith

rituals were conducted by different faith chaplains (which were always optional), course graduates shared their experiences with new course members and those who were on induction and staff were trained in making referrals to the chaplaincy department in this area. Chaplains inputted into sentence reviews, parole and lifer reports and commented on participation and learning from the group with their permission.

The research is unique as it gives voice to both the practitioner researcher's point of view and a participant voice. This was not without ethical difficulty because of the transient nature, confidential and security implications of researching from within a forensic population. It is with the participant's permission and mine that I bring these findings. The issues surrounding the length of sentence and the time at which they addressed these issues within their sentence were also significant. For example, the majority of the prisoners who attended the course in the open prison were coping with the loss of a contained environment and those beginning life and long term sentences were coping with the loss of freedom in an adult body. The research was also collaborative in that the prisoners in the support group were open to how the prison system could be humanised and address in part the losses they faced in order for them to live in a healthy and spiritual way with them. The research took me on a journey which initially had been supporting men with bereavements to a greater and deeper understanding of what I term 'imprisoned grief'.

What I want to explore here are the theological and spiritual implications of the research and how this informs the role of the chaplain in the forensic setting. My hunch is that what is distinctive about the role of the prison chaplain is its structural and symbolic place within the prison in which its theological roots which can inform, facilitate, and create a spirituality of loss which is counter-cultural in a forensic setting. It is a role which I conclude can enfranchise and liberate imprisoned grief.

Firstly I wish to share some of the literature which helped me reflect upon these experiences.

I was unable to find any direct literature about the distinctive role of prison chaplains in supporting men and women with issues of loss and bereavement in prison. Various authors provide images for prison chaplaincy, such as 'shepherding away from home', liminars, ministry of presence and the providers of ritual and symbol.

Firstly, Rowan Williams' article on prison ministry talks of 'shepherding away from home'. He accentuates the fact that as prison chaplains we are dealing with people who are going through enormous change, insecurity and loss in different ways.

'People are living away from their natural support structures...It is true to that because of the isolation of people from their usual support systems, confrontation and the explicit call to repentance or change, are not likely to be helpful to say the least. They may have short term effect-but only as another way of offering a new and 'safe' identity in a new and strange land. But a ministry that asks no questions will not bring people nearer to what will genuinely feed or sustain them. The notion that seems to me to capture what most matters here is that of a ministry of 'reminding.'" (2003, pp.54-55)

The chaplain reminds individuals that there is more to life than prison and that they can talk about their past history without fear. Williams says:

'[B]ecause God has no fear of us or of what we say and do no repugnance or contempt no will to reject. God has time to hear us out, to listen to our confused attempts to come somewhere nearer the truth'. (2003, p.55)

I believe that the term 'shepherding away from home' has a direct connection to disenfranchised grief.

Secondly, Arbuckle refers to chaplains who deal with people in the midst of change:

'Chaplains as pastoral liminars or 'people on the margins', 'betwixt and between people'... Chaplains, as pastoral *liminars*, must consequently expect to be little understood by people of other ministries and not infrequently subtly or not so subtly marginalized'. (1999, p.158).

Further,

'Chaplains, in their role as prophetic liminal or refounding leaders in chaos, must *inter alia* be grief leaders, calling fellow Christians and churches to let go of the familiar and historically irrelevant in order to risk the unknown. We Westerners however have culturally lost the art of dying, so we must build appropriate rituals of loss that the new and creative may enter into our lives and communities. Mourning experiences of traditional cultures, including the cultures of the Old and New Testaments, can guide us'. (1999, pp.160-61)

Hall discusses the theological underpinning of prison ministry and addresses the image of presence:

'A working theology of prison ministry begins with an understanding of the inherent worth of humankind as God's creation... being present with those in prison as a way of responding to and modelling the incarnation. The ministry of presence is not only what we do because of what we believe... a ministry of presence is valuable for how it communicates to the imprisoned that they are not alone and forgotten... In summary, a theology of prison ministry begins with an understanding of the inherent worth of all humankind as created by God in God's own image, addresses the question of hope, embodies the incarnate presence of God by being present, enables the giving and receiving of forgiveness, deals with issues of power and control, and respects the diverse paths that humans take in their walk toward and with God'. (2004, p.170)

Secondly, Doka defines disenfranchised grief as

'[G]rief that persons experience when they incur loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. The concept of disenfranchised grief recognizes that societies have sets of norms - in effect, 'grieving rules'- that attempt to specify who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve'. (1989, p.4)

Those who grieve can find their grief disenfranchised because their relationship to the deceased is not recognized, their loss is not recognized and they as the griever are not recognized. Disenfranchising the griever inevitably exacerbates problems suffered as a result of bereavement.

Corr (1989) takes this concept one step further:

'It is important to observe that whatever is disenfranchised is not merely silent, unexpressed, unnoticed, or forgotten. Any bereaved person may decide not to reveal his or her grief or some of its specific aspects to a surrounding community. Failing to disclose or communicate to others what one is experiencing in grief does not mean that grief is disenfranchised... [D]isenfranchisement in bereavement and grief goes beyond a situation of mere unawareness to suggest a more or less active process of disavowal, renunciation, and rejection. Disenfranchisement applies to those who are not accorded the social franchise to have their voices heard or their votes counted and who are thereby confined to second class status and political subjugation'. (1989, p.40)

One can easily see parallels in the prison situation. When a loved one dies whilst someone is serving time in prison, the prisoner often feels disenfranchised because they have not been kept informed about a relative's condition so that the death comes as a shock. They are powerless and helpless to do anything to comfort their family or to receive any comfort themselves. They cannot assist in the funeral arrangements and sometimes are not allowed to attend a funeral if the person who has died is not next of kin. Many of the natural facilities and conditions for mourning are missing. Doka (1989, pp.187-198) argues that the disenfranchisement is a sociological concept, which involves family and friends.

Kauffman (1989) sees the disenfranchisement on an intrapsychic level, where the disenfranchisement arises within oneself. He suggests:

'In self-disenfranchised grief, incipient grief is not recognized or is covered over, much the same as in socially disenfranchised grief, except that the source is oneself. While in societal disenfranchised grief the source of the disenfranchisement is the failure of others to acknowledge and recognize the grief, in self-disenfranchised grief the source is one's *own* lack of acknowledgement and recognition of it. The specific psychological phenomenon operating in disenfranchised grief is shame... In self-disenfranchisement the source of shame and inhibition of the grief process is not in the actual views of others, but in the imagined view of others or the intrapsychic dynamics of the individual'. (1989, p.25)

In relating this concept to the prison context, one can see that prisoners will keep their grief bottled up or only share it in the privacy of a one-to-one pastoral encounter with the chaplain for fear of how this might look to others. Vulnerability in this situation is private not public. Kauffman says in psychoanalytic terms that:

'Being disenfranchised is itself a loss, a loss that is narcissistic injury to one's self-regard and how one experiences, values, secures, and defines oneself. Disenfranchisement is an injury that blocks the possibility of mourning; self is

turned inward, wishing repair, but instead it repeatedly attacks itself with its worthlessness'. (2002, p.63)

Kaufmann (1989, pp.27-29) likens this concept to Freud's theory of melancholia. He later suggests that some disenfranchised grievers have shame about their own emotions in this difficult situation; they might have a memory of past unsanctioned grief and when they feel overwhelmed with grief their shame-prone personality traits are revealed. He concludes that feeling disenfranchised in the self, coupled with lack of social sanctioning and support, results in disillusionment and alienation.

'Community is the natural support network in which one's basic sense of *identity* and *belongingness* are realized. The space of family, friends, church neighbours, and colleagues in which we live is the arena in which we experience the human reality of our existence. When bereavement needs are disenfranchised by one's community, those parts of oneself where the unrealized, unrecognized, unsatisfied, disenfranchised pain exists are negated. This pain in an especially meaningful way defines who one really is, and so the value of one's bond to the community can be damaged. Our basic sense of belonging, the shelter of being in a community, our realization of ourselves as community dwellers, the touchstone of our being a social animal- this sense is disenfranchised. The loss of community that may occur as a consequence of disenfranchised grief fosters an abiding sense of loneliness and abandonment'. (1989, p.29)

So, disenfranchised grief is both societal and intrapsychic.

Lastly, I have based my theological reflection on the model outlined by Thompson (2008) which gives a way of reflecting from a standpoint of faith with a view to making a difference to one's practice. It professes to offer the opportunity to integrate theological theory with ordinary experience. Theological insights will be brought to bear on disenfranchised grief as experienced by prisoners and how the symbolic and structural role of the Chaplain can be enriched. In essence this chapter details the workings behind and my progress towards a refined conceptual framework and my recommendations and conclusions. The chaplain's ministry can facilitate the movement from disenfranchised grief to imprisoned grief and ultimately help enable liberation and enfranchisement from this experience, through the ministry of the chaplain. 'Transformation' for prisoner, family, prison staff and chaplain is the desired outcome.

Thompson (2008) suggests that theological action research is 'a kind of theological pedagogy' where there is a development of reflective practices in and for the practices of faith. In order for this to happen she suggests:

'Progressing theological reflection must always be a matter of genuine critical enquiry, engagement with otherness and being ready to let go of the familiar and to reach out into the unknown. Reflectors need to expect to be changed in terms of previously held views or assumptions, and expect to see things in new light and a wider, deeper context. For this to happen, it is necessary when bringing a particular situation to the scrutiny of theological reflection to approach it with real wondering and open-mindedness'. (p. 30-31)

Progressive theological reflection sits under the umbrella of practical theology which for the purposes of this research is 'transformative in practice. Graham (1996) states:

Criteria for authentic Christian pastoral practice as determined by a model of liberatory praxis locate human identity within history, and identify theological knowledge as arising from a specific context and harnessed to transformatory and political ends. Models of Christian pastoral practice within liberation theology ground the normative principles for solid transformation in a model of action and reflection upon experience and social context'. (p.139)

The liberation of disenfranchised grief can be described as 'theology- in-action' as used in Graham, Walton, Ward (2005)

[T]heology-in-action represents a paradigm shift in the epistemology of theology. It insists on a unity of action and reflection, emerging from concrete experiential knowledge, and adopts an inductive method that tests the efficacy of Christian teaching in the arena of practical action. This demands a process of reflection and received tradition in the light of substantial problematic such as poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion: a process of theological reflection on practice that emerges from 'grassroots' experience. (p.196)

My action research listens to the voices of the research participants, reflects upon them and then initiates change to improve the support that is offered. Prison chaplaincy more generally, and this approach in particular, can be helpfully interpreted using the paradigm of the liberationist approach to theology, where there is a concern for social change amongst the disadvantaged in the pursuit of freedom and human liberation. Gutierrez (1988) and Boff (1987) both emphasise the emancipation which is generated within a context where there is engagement and action: the theology is therefore active and living, hence the double meaning of the title 'Living with Loss.'

It is with progressive theological reflection within the context of practical theology and its transformative quality that I now wish to theologically reflect upon three research themes. I will be using the Christian scriptures, theological literature in order to do this and will be quoting directly from the data transcripts.

Hidden nature of grief and loss, and the hidden role of the chaplain

The hidden nature of grief in the prison environment is a hidden sorrow for those who feel disenfranchised from natural support structures. The feelings and emotions associated with grief are those that prisoners do not feel that they can share with others due to the bravado and culture of the environment.

Firstly, prisoners describe how being withdrawn and depressed at times helped them live with their losses:

Maybe because it is my first time inside I am not like that as a person, but I had a lot going on where you just want your own space, though they mean well, always at your door and coming in. Smiling is a mask you put on. (LWLK)

And in a place like this even more so?

Facilitator: When you are isolated it can be very destructive. And you were saying earlier Steven about those suicidal feelings that depressed state looked like a way out.

A good way out, at times, when you are there. It's a sure-fire way of a peaceful night (LWLW).

In using the scriptures one can find similar examples, such as the Israelites in exile who felt hidden and abandoned and the disciples who after the resurrection of Jesus locked themselves in a room for fear of the Jews, confronting their loss and sense of isolation. However in both instances God revealed himself to them and their faith encourages them to carry on. The Israelites were set free from their exile and Jesus appeared to the disciples and gave specific instructions in how they should share their faith. They were not abandoned. God was present despite the context. The presence of the Chaplain in the prison setting is the constant reminder that this is the case, even though grief and loss can remain hidden to those who do not want to see or hear. The Chaplain gives the permission to grieve in providing the opportunity for tears, ritual, to mourn, to feel regret and to express what would remain hidden emotions. The chaplain approaches the prisoners who can find themselves in a wilderness experience. Moody (1999) captures this in his chapter on 'Spirituality and Sector ministry' in Legood's (ed.) book on Chaplaincy, where the sector minister is able to enter the wilderness of that experience, and that changes the character of the pastoral relationship.

'This quality of 'being in the wilderness' is reinforced in many institutional contexts by the fact that students, patients, prisoners or new recruits have been cut adrift from the normal ties which secure their sense of identity and self worth and feel lost and confused... Like Elijah in the wilderness brought to the point of exhaustion by his own efforts and the enmity of the powers that be, it is in the midst of such turmoil we discover the 'still small voice' which simultaneously reassures us and renews our sense of purpose' (1Kings 19:1-18). Jesus, in his parables, describes the wilderness as a place where unclean spirits roam about seeking rest (Matthew 12:43-45). As in biblical tradition, the wilderness was the place where demonic energy was unleashed and unmasked, so, paradoxically, it could become the place where God, also would make himself known directly within the context of spiritual conflict and encounter'. (p.16-17)

This area of the Chaplain's ministry has not been examined before and remains hidden academically as well as in practice. It remains hidden within the institution in the fact that this is only concerned with disenfranchisement and matters of security of release to a funeral. It also remains hidden to those who work in other disciplines such as psychology, education and probation; individuals are not actively supported and encouraged to explore their feelings in regard to grief and loss. It remains hidden, due to the fears and reactions of staff if grief is exposed in such a volatile environment. In part it has been my experience that staff often feel that they too need this level of support from the chaplain in living with their own losses, even though they are in a different situation where they can access this elsewhere.

However, within the prison environment there is often a sub-conscious attack on any effort to attempt to do this. Examples of this can be found in the transcripts of the *Living with Loss* course, where officers would knock at the door and ask to see prisoners during the course work, or want to deliver them back to the wing to move cells. Alarm bells would ring and stand fast roll checks took place where the number of prisoners in the room had to be counted. There was lack of preparation for release into the community and not knowing the future would cause anxiety, so separation from the prison environment would be disrupted. There would be difficulties of security clearance surrounding visitors delivering the *Living with Loss* course as paperwork would go missing.

This research now brings these issues to the surface and highlights them as important to understand from a different perspective, where faith and theological reflection can make a difference as Moody (1999) suggests:

‘...To minister in such a context is to be made aware of how far we are acted upon all the time by forces beyond our control, but also how we are able to seize the initiative to intervene at a crucial stage in the life journeys of others’. (p. 17).

Solidarity

Solidarity was a theme raised by prisoners who undertook the ‘*Living with Loss*’ course as well as members of the support group. Theologically this is an important theme as it shows a collective and liberationist approach to tackling a social issue. Disenfranchised grief is a real live situation which people of faith are seen to be active in liberating. The Chaplain has a commitment to the people that he or she is working with and creates a unique closeness and trust within the group. The chaplain creates a community of belonging and can act as an advocate, to improve the humanitarian approach to their situation. This for me is spirituality in action - the image of a prison as a ‘bomb disposal expert’. The Chaplain is willing to be the risk taker with particular prisoners who are living with traumatic grief and loss, diffusing the bomb slowly ticking away inside. The Chaplain goes to some dark places with individual prisoners and sheds light so issues can look differently in the light. This is a time when the Chaplain and a prisoner can imagine what they could be like now the light is shining. This can cause unsettling feelings for other staff, who believe that they must remain on top and that to shed light on what is inside can be dangerous and unsettling. This is part of what I have named the counter-hegemonic role of the chaplain. There is a prophetic role for the Chaplain to play where there is injustice and people can feel unheard and unsupported even in their own land. There is a place for chaplains to speak out about the place of hope in a person’s spiritual development.

On reflection it is clear that the disciples facing the loss of Jesus were committed to one another to lessen their sense of isolation. There was a sense of clinging onto the past and onto their leader. They knew they would have to let go of him but none of them wanted to do this alone. Their actions were normal as a response to fear, but gradually in their separation and their encounters with others who saw that they had a prophetic role were willing to carry out a ministry which was not without risk.

These feelings are similar to those expressed in the data. The opposite of disenfranchisement is to receive peer support. This empowers and motivates prisoners to support each other and ultimately do the work they need to do for themselves.

Confidentiality, who can I talk to? Friends have got him through. Good idea to be with the ones who are in similar situation, solidarity within the group, chatting and listening to other people's stories has helped. (LWLSG)

And another:

I think it is just important to be with people who have been in a similar situation as you, being with each other is very important, sharing with each other is very important, I never really got going with the 3 sessions of counselling that I had, something ongoing and in more depth would be very helpful to me (LWLSG).

It is something that, it is very important to have someone else inside who knows what we are talking about and who knows what you are going through

Facilitator: What do you want to get from the group?

Am I allowed to speak openly?

Facilitator: Yes

Dealing with the unhappiness that you feel, it's difficult for people to understand how you are feeling solidarity. You feel more relaxed because everyone has been through it. It gives you a chance to gauge yourself, test yourself how far you can come through it; it feels like this is the place to be in. Getting rid of inhibitions (LWLSG)

I want to sign myself off and think about it all the time, in the day when it happened, when I am looking for answers and you never seem to find them LWLK).

Facilitator: Are you still searching?

Yes, very much

Yeah, plus it's nice to know that sometimes that you get worried because you get all whatever you are feeling, you just think it's you, you're doing nothing but feeling a bit sorry for yourself and when hear that someone else is going through the same thing you realise it's just a process and not just you, you know. Also here we've got time you know talking about the way it deals with it, I find that quite helpful, celebrating it, getting on with it, knowing that they are always there rather than as I said before, someone said to me before don't let my death overshadow what I've done in life, at the time I was 'shut up' you know, let me get on with it, but I think that sort of relevant of what he was saying, I think that's quite good, that. (LWLSG).

The Chaplain has acted as the gate keeper and the bridge in this regard. In the group setting prisoners can find inspiration from the stories of others. Also on a family visit the chaplain is a link in enfranchising people through building community using solidarity as a tool, either through worship or in group work.

The re-awakening of faith in the light of imminent loss and with the loss of a loved one

There can be a re-awakening of faith in the light of imminent loss and grief and following the loss of a loved one. My data highlights the fact that if the prisoner had not loved the deceased so much then their loss would not be so painful.

If you love the person it is more difficult to get over it. (LWLK)

Another example of this shows how disenfranchised prisoners feel when they receive news of a sudden death:

If its close family you become part of the process don't you, you become part of the group that is involved with that person dying. There are discussions about stuff so you can share feelings and emotions with even the person themselves. So when it happens like that you think I just wanted them to know that I loved them. I just wanted to say this, or I wanted an answer to this and you can get those things, but when it is sudden you can't. (LWLW)

Another suggested:

The only way I take any sort of solace or whatever you want to call it From it is just by saying to me that it is inevitable. It is the when obviously because some people, very sadly, die very young, and that is a crying shame. So it isn't usually the when it's the how, but it is inevitable that we go through what we call old age, and that is something that we all have to face. (LWLW)

On reflecting upon the scriptures the same is true of Peter and Jesus' mother Mary seeing Jesus on the cross. There is darkness following a loss and a struggle to find what strength is at hand to cope. The data shows that having a faith enabled prisoners to make a decision to change in the way in which they approached and lived with the losses that they were facing.

I came to light a candle on the anniversary and that was really helpful to me. (KFG1)

It is lovely coming in here as it is just so nice and quiet in the Chapel, it is really loud on the billet. (KFG2)

Other examples of rituals that were facilitated as part of the Living with Loss course were the writing of a letter to the deceased about how they felt and then burning it, meditation in front of Buddha, reading of the psalms, playing of music, looking at photos, and use of funeral prayers and the lighting of candles. Ritual which includes talking about memories of the deceased can positively assist in the grieving process.

The use of memorials and remembrance had a profound effect upon prisoners and assisted with the enfranchisement process and kept alive the memory and the spirit of the deceased alive.

Liebling (2011) suggests:

'One motive for adopting religion in the prison context was as a tool for 'dealing with losses'. In this sense, religion acted as a form of psychological protection and permitted a 'personal sense of peace' by filling the gaps exposed by the experience of imprisonment (Clear et al., 2000:61; Dammer, 2002:40). Prisoners described feelings of loneliness, depression and a sense of 'being lost in a hostile environment'. (p. 50)

In this ministry, chaplains identify the spiritual needs of prisoners and the meaning and purpose of what has happened to them in their journey through loss and grief. Prisoners look to them to give spiritual signposts. Attig (2004) speculates that the work of the spirit is to re-immense one's life with the transcendent and to put one's trust in what I may become. In order to transpose this idea to the prison environment where people can thrive, they need to use their imagination and their belief that there is potential hope for such a person. An example of this was one prisoner who was in denial of his crime (the murder of his father), who gradually took responsibility for his actions, and then began to mourn for the loss of his father. He wrote a letter to him as part of his faith ritual when the Living with Loss course finished and in the letter was all that he wanted to say about what happened that day and what led up to the breakdown of their relationship. He wanted to say sorry for stealing money from him when he was in hospital and that the fight they had prior to his death was an accident. He wanted his father's forgiveness. There was no physical way in which he could make his peace with his father, but this symbolic way through ritual enabled him to do so. This went beyond victim empathy and awareness to a death of spiritual freedom that he felt when he admitted to himself what his actions had led to and the trauma of this event. He was overshadowed by grief and loss and had not been able to process any of his emotions and feelings connected to the death of his father until this point. The pains of imprisonment were literally those of grief and mourning. There was an opportunity for the chaplain and prisoner to see the ritual as an opportunity for meaning making and to envision possibilities for him to develop. The chaplain's role is then to be more of an abiding presence, to interpret the sense of absence which pervades bereavement, and which is doubly so for the prisoner. This example leaves open to question the role of reparation as an impetus for therapeutic change within an individual. This self-disclosure reveals the vulnerability that an individual exposes to them and the valuable work that a chaplain can do in assisting people to move on in living with loss. The quality of the relationship between the prisoner and the Chaplain is one of trust and confidence which can produce creative and surprising outcomes. Attig (2004) describes the role of enfranchising as setting free, which is the work of the spirit and involves a commitment on an individual's part to say 'yes' to what they may become in the face of loss. Attig says:

'Mourners can also hope to reach through the pain of these struggles and stretch into inevitably new contexts and ways of living that allow them to thrive again'. (p.211)

An example of this was a prisoner who had become both mother and father to his children following the death of his wife. His imprisonment had not provided him with a straightforward reengagement upon release.

There is a sacramental role here for the chaplain.

Part of enfranchising is to return to the familiar. This is difficult for the prisoner to achieve in a physical sense, but ritual, the familiarity of the prayers and the symbolism of a lighted candle can bring them some way forward. Living with loss is a searching for answers. This is important for the chaplain to notice as existential questions may arise as to the purpose and meaning of what they are going through. This is an example of the spirituality of loss that prisoners can explore with the chaplain whose role is distinctively about identifying these questions and discussing them with individuals, providing hope and comfort.

I now look at death as inevitable, we all die at some point, it is sad but that is the way it is. Make the most of the life you have got. The little things like guilt, I just try to make myself a better person in the situation you are in, for me it is getting back to normal ways. (LWLK)

A spirituality of loss which weighs placing and meeting God when reflecting upon what it means to be fully human and alive is at the centre of the work of the chaplain. This is spirit and soul work. It is liberating, counter-cultural and risky. Chaplains believe that no one is beyond God's love and that faith can be re-awakened in the face of loss. They convey the message that you do not suffer loss with God; you only gain. Worship and ritual can provide the context for this, in which there is an expression of spiritual freedom that is not associated or identified with feeling incarcerated; rather, it enables the expression of loss. Paying attention to the memories that the deceased provoke can be a spiritual experience as those memories offer a sense of enduring love. When faced with the physical impossibility of touching base with home, these become important, as there is a spiritual homecoming, with an opportunity to touch the eternal and transcendent in the fact that this person has indelibly touched another life. One prisoner put it this way:

I think inevitably from the day that we know that we are born that our life is not eternal and we know that we are going to die sooner or later. Obviously now we know that the closest people to us, our loved ones, mean so much to us. We are seeking, consoling within ourselves. It's hard to explain, but I think it boils down to maturity and wisdom on life itself, 'cause it's part of our human existence, we know that from the day we are born we do the days part and parcel of life you know what I mean. I know that we've got these feelings, but why do we feel these feelings because we know that it's part of life. (LWLW)

The only way I take any sort of solace or whatever you want to call it, it is just by saying to me that it is inevitable. It is the when obviously because some people, very sadly, die very young, and that is a crying shame. So it isn't usually the when it's the how, but it is inevitable that we go through what we call old age, and that is something that we all have to face. (LWLW)

Hope and Resilience

The themes of hope and resilience came from the data in regard to the support group and are part of what the chaplain's support in their one-to-one ministry. The chaplains also embody hope and resilience within the structure of the prison as well as being the symbols of them.

Jesus' disciples hoped that their leader would return to them again and that death would not be the end, even if they did not understand it at the time, as Jesus had predicted. They wanted physical proof, revealed to them in the Resurrection. Prisoners unable to reach through the pain and experience of physical loss, denied to them because of their incarceration, are encouraged to be resilient in coping with this and to see that there is hope in the future with regard to loss. Those of faith on the course had a sense of being re-united; that life was eternal and that living was finite in the body.

I exploded, keep it in for that long, it has to come out somehow, like you were saying before, the gym is a good release. (LWLW).

Very symbolic – that the weight was off your shoulders – they say that you know that you have got the weight of the world on your shoulders. Sometimes after grief, when you let that go your emotions can come out, sort of found that quite symbolic, like when he fell I nearly burst into tears, seems like he accepted it all you know. (LWLW)

I don't think you ever let go completely. In my case I can't imagine ever saying I'm ok now I can let go – I can't imagine that but there is ways of dealing with it and accepting it maybe. I don't think you can completely let go. (LWLK)

The sense of absence is paramount and acute and if the deceased had been a valued and respected attachment figures to a prisoner in their younger days this loss could become all consuming. What chaplains offer is the hope and possibility of survival through this experience. This is the work again on the spirit and soul of a person. The nature of the chaplain's ministry in this case is that you encounter extreme pain. Attig (2004) suggests:

'Caregivers can express in word and deed a belief that the mourner has within him or herself a drive to transcend suffering and the potential to find and make meaning again and they can appeal to the resilience of mourners' souls and spirits. They can invite them to reflect on whether those they mourn would want them to dwell in the depth of suffering or overcome it and return to thriving and living meaningfully'. (p.212)

Yes, it might have, obviously I was upset, and I just believe that in life, even at that early stage, once you pass away, you pass away, there is nothing we can do about it, and you've just got to accept it. (LWLW)

Facilitator: It's part of life.

Yes, there is nothing we can do about it, you have just got to accept it and get on with life itself, but that is just my outlook, everyone has got a different outlook that is just me. (LWLW)

Facilitator: So you felt that you could deal with the feelings at that time and the family helped you to deal with your feelings?

Yes, I was heartbroken at the time, don't get me wrong, because it's your mother isn't it, but you live with it, don't you. (LWLW).

Facilitator: And the culture there, doing it that way.

I've got a big family, you see, I've got a big massive family, when one person dies, I suppose it's for every family, everyone comes together, you all help out, my dad was only a young man at the time, they all helped out but it's life isn't it. (LWLW)

Seeking to know God's way in this situation suggests that theology takes a play in the discussion of these issues. Having a shared faith can be used as a resource to enfranchise this situation and it has long been established that faith has a role to play in supporting those who live with grief and loss. It is the power of the transcendent that enables the transformation to happen.

Prison chaplaincy is about meeting spiritual needs of prisoners in a place where there are a set of values which often pose a counter-cultural approach to the way in which the prison system works; where meaning, purpose and recovery lie at the heart of the ministry. Chaplains value the feelings that prisoners have of recognising the familiar in prayer and worship, where there is an emphasis upon hope and living life to the full. The way in which the research was carried, the Living with Loss course and the support group operated, gave prisoners moral agency over the way they lived with loss experiences. In an environment where they feel powerless and disenfranchised they cannot often make the choice to become responsible adults and to test this out for themselves. Prisoners attended this course voluntarily out of choice. They could apply the skills, meaning and understanding from the course materials and apply it to their lives.

Conclusions

My frame of reference for this research became the structural and symbolic role of the prison chaplain in enabling the liberator and enfranchiser of imprisoned grief. This grief can be seen as imprisoned because a person is either behind bars, a wall, or a fence away from the community and is thus disenfranchised. It can also apply to the fact that they may feel imprisoned within their own loss experience, or that their grief is imprisoned within themselves. Many different emotions can imprison one's grief including fear and shame. It is possible that a person can self-disenfranchise and not allow themselves the recognition of grief. What is lost within this imprisoned grief can be oneself, relationships and friendships, hopes, dreams and potential. The role of the chaplain as a liberator is complex, but the underlying motivation is transformation under circumstances of disenfranchised containment. Thus the role of the chaplain needs to have the space to allow for that liberation to occur.

This has significant outcomes for those involved in the group work and for a new understanding of the chaplains' role in this work. There has been a shift in the praxis which has been informed by the research. Seeking to know God's way in this situation suggests that theology adds value and meaning. Sharing and practising a faith can be used as a resource to liberate and enfranchise. It is the power of the

transcendent that enables the transformation to happen. Graham, Walton, Ward (2005) comment:

‘Pastoral theology is theological because it always refers back to a transcendent reality, which forms the horizon over against which its praxis can be judged’.

Furthermore, Graham’s theology of practice is essentially of a discipline that enables people to live authentic lives by articulating a vision of the good and true in the concrete. Transformative practices are the embodiments and witnesses to ‘Divine activity amidst human practice’ (Graham 2000, p.113), as glimpses of the Word made flesh (p. 194-195).

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