

Trauma, Grief, and Ministry

Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs, M.Div.

Episcopal Chaplain, The Johns Hopkins Hospital

ACPE Certified Educator Candidate

Kübler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief

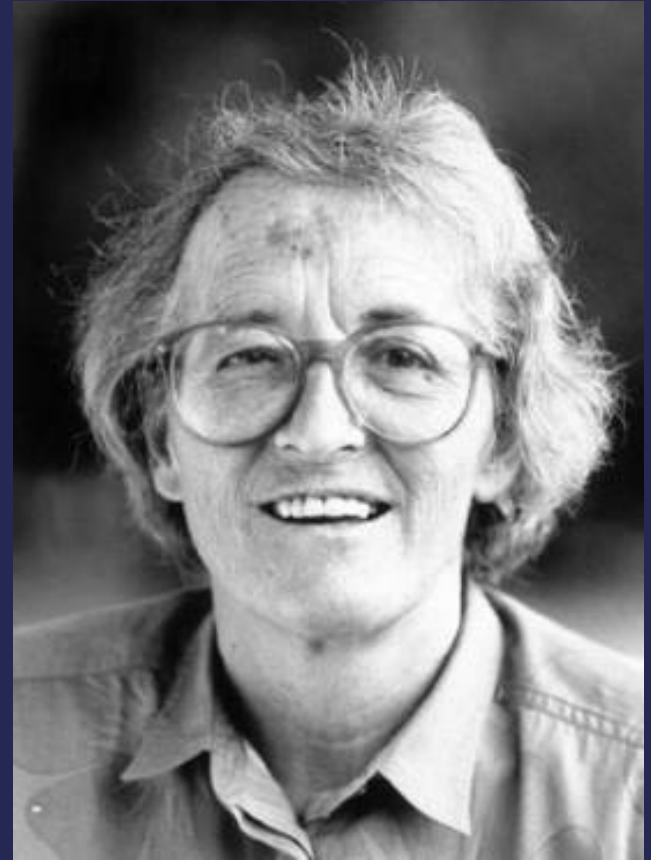
- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance



"Grief," Bertram Mackennal.
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/ae/Bertram_Mackennal_-_Grief.jpg/718px-Bertram_Mackennal_-_Grief.jpg

“No loss counts more than another. It is your loss that counts for you. It is your loss that affects you. Your loss is deep and deserves your personal attention without comparison. You are the only one who can survey the magnitude of your loss. No one will ever know the meaning of what was shared, the deepness of the void that shadows your future.”

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Kübler-Ross#/media/File:Elisabeth_Kübler-Ross_\(1926_-_2004\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Kübler-Ross#/media/File:Elisabeth_Kübler-Ross_(1926_-_2004).jpg)

“Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life.”

Judith Herman



https://www.guilford.com/authors/photos/Herman_Judith_Lewis_530153.jpg

Immediate and Delayed Trauma Reactions¹

Immediate Emotional Reactions

Numbness and detachment
Anxiety or severe fear
Guilt (including survivor guilt)
Exhilaration as a result of surviving
Anger
Sadness
Helplessness
Feeling unreal; depersonalization
(e.g., feeling as if you are watching yourself)
Disorientation
Feeling out of control
Denial
Constriction of feelings
Feeling overwhelmed

Delayed Emotional Reactions

Irritability and/or hostility
Depression
Mood swings, instability
Anxiety (e.g., phobia, generalized anxiety)
Fear of trauma recurrence
Grief reactions
Shame
Feelings of fragility and/or vulnerability
Emotional detachment from anything that
requires emotional reactions

¹ Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Rockville (MD): [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(US\)](#); 2014.

Immediate and Delayed Trauma Reactions

Immediate Cognitive Reactions

Difficulty concentrating
Rumination or racing thoughts
Distortion of time and space
Memory problems
Strong identification with victims

Delayed Cognitive Reactions

Intrusive memories or flashbacks
Reactivation of previous traumatic events
Self-blame
Preoccupation with event
Difficulty making decisions
Magical thinking
Belief that feelings or memories are dangerous
Generalization of triggers
Suicidal thinking

Immediate and Delayed Trauma Reactions

Immediate Behavioral Reactions

Startled reaction
Restlessness
Sleep and appetite disturbances
Difficulty expressing oneself
Argumentative behavior
Increased use of alcohol, drugs,
and tobacco
Withdrawal and apathy
Avoidant behaviors

Delayed Behavioral Reactions

Avoidance of event reminders
Social relationship disturbances
Decreased activity level
Engagement in high-risk behaviors
Increased use of alcohol and drugs
Withdrawal

Immediate and Delayed Trauma Reactions

Immediate Existential Reactions

Intense use of prayer
Restoration of faith in the goodness of others
Loss of self-efficacy
Despair about humanity, particularly if the event was intentional
Immediate disruption of life assumptions

Delayed Existential Reactions

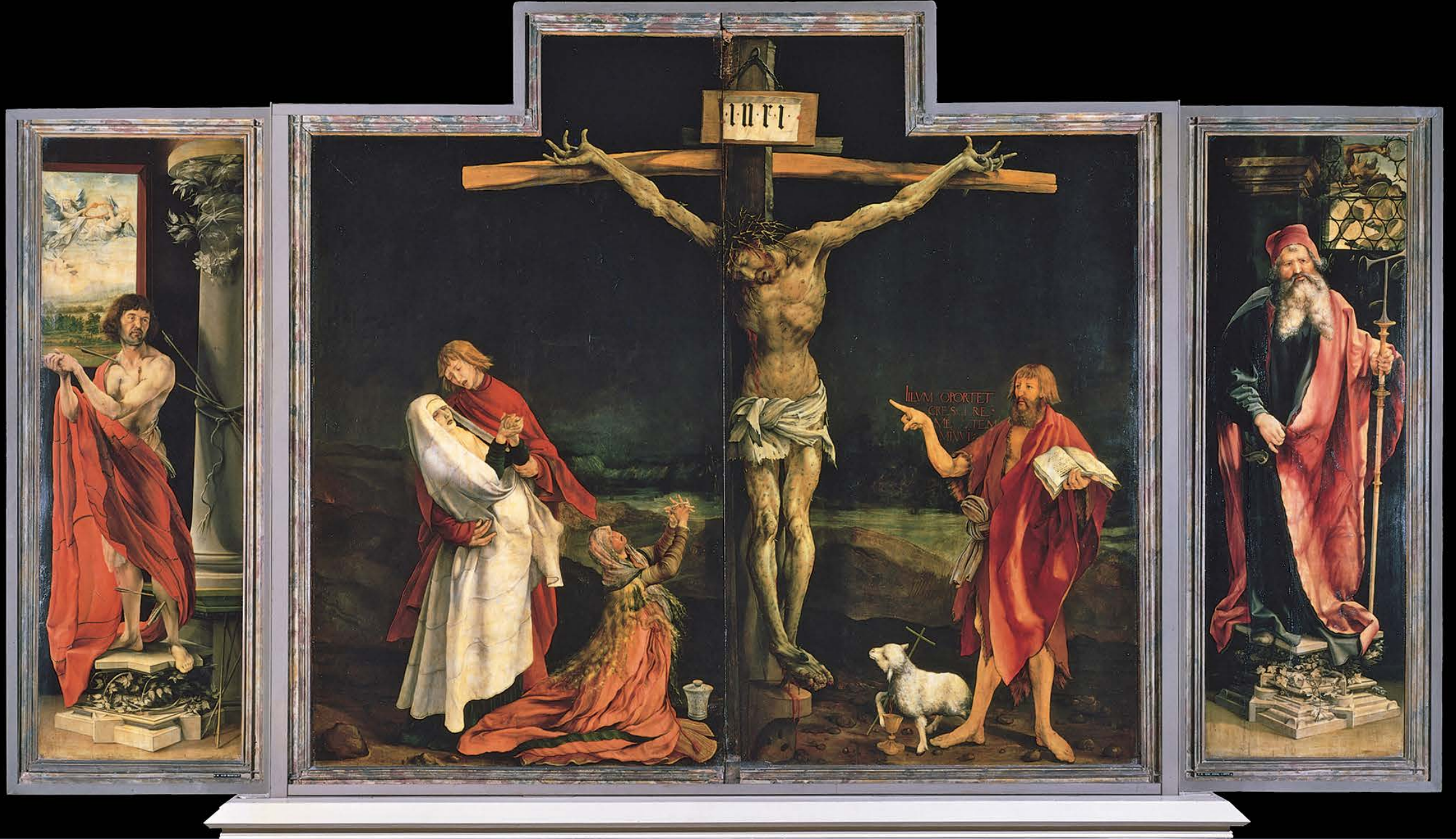
Questioning (e.g., "Why me?")
Increased cynicism, disillusionment
Increased self-confidence
Loss of purpose
Renewed faith
Hopelessness
Reestablishing priorities
Redefining meaning and importance of life
Reworking life's assumptions to accommodate the trauma

“The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.”

Paul Tillich

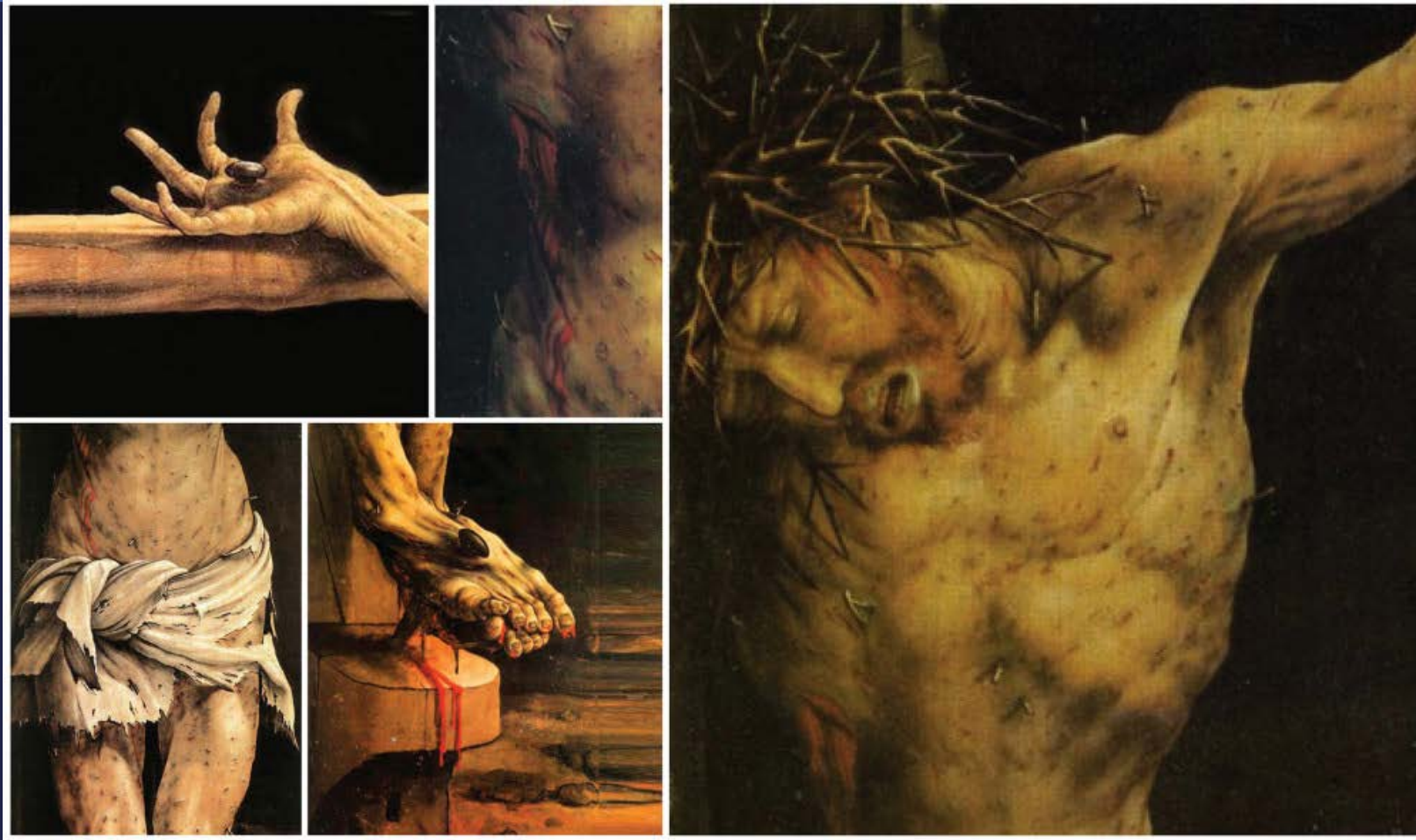


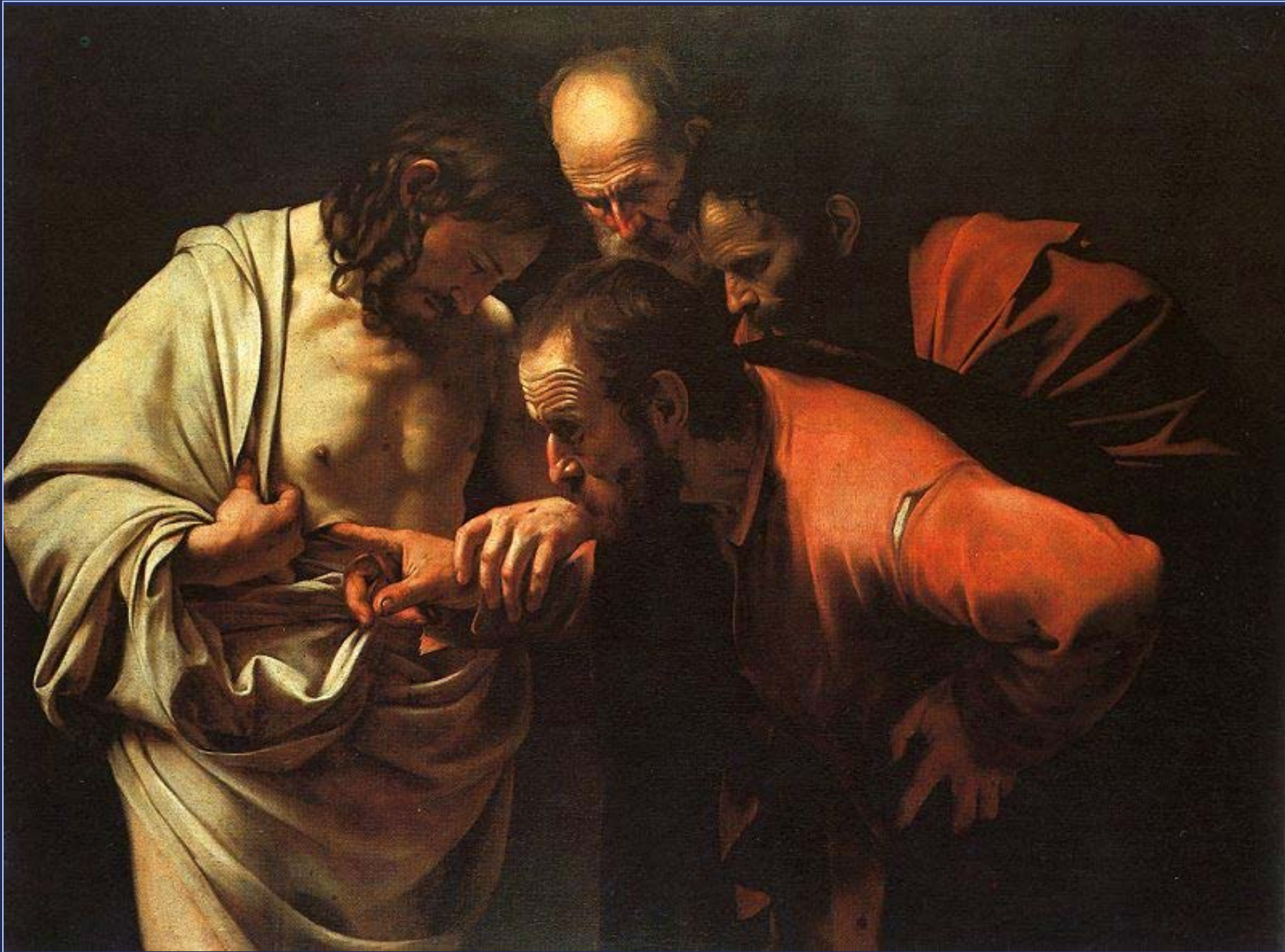
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Tillich#/media/File:Paul_Tillich.jpg



Matthias Grünewald, "Isenheim Altarpiece." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece#/media/File:Grunewald_Isenheim1.jpg

The Post-Traumatic God





"The Incredulity of St. Thomas," Caravaggio. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas.jpg)

“Doubt is overcome not by repression but by courage. Courage does not deny that there is doubt, but it takes the doubt into itself as an expression of its own finitude and affirms the content of an ultimate concern. Courage does not need the safety of an unquestionable conviction. It includes the risk without which no creative life is possible.”

Paul Tillich



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Tillich#/media/File:Paul_Tillich.jpg

Post-Traumatic Ministry (John 20:19-29, NRSV)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Post-Traumatic Ministry

- Speak words of peace.
- Own your woundedness.
- Love people into relationship.
- Listen to understand, not respond.



<https://www.lifegate.com/app/uploads/kintsugi-piatto-blu1.jpg>

Resources

- Berinato, Scott. "That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief." Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>. Accessed April 8, 2020.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. 2nd edition. New York: Basic, 1997.
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth and David Kessler. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner, 2005.
- Peters, David W. *Post-Traumatic God: How the Church Cares for People Who Have Been to Hell and Back*. New York: Morehouse, 2016.
- Nouwen, Henri. *The Wounded Healer*. New York: Doubleday, 1979.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale, 2000.
- Wicks, Robert J. *Riding the Dragon: 40 Lessons for Inner Strength in Challenging Times*. Notre Dame: Sorin, 2003.