

A Light in the Clearing

When the prophet Elijah, deep in the throes of an existential crisis, fled to Mount Horeb in search of God, he was met instead with the sound of sheer silence.

Natalie Pisarcik knows just how he felt.

“There was a time in my life where I was on the bottom,” Natalie testified during Sunday worship in her home congregation, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, New Jersey. “I cannot even describe how hard and difficult that time was. Only those who have been there know how it feels.”

Natalie’s story recollected a significant turning point in her life. “On that fateful day, I went for a walk in a wooded area where I kept repeating over and over in my wounded brain how I would end the pain. As I walked, I came across a field, which oddly seemed to call to me. As I walked into the field, a beam of warm sunlight hit my face. It was at this exact moment that I realized I had made a terrible mistake. It was like God was saying to me, ‘What are you doing? You have a reason to live.’ I was so overcome.”

Natalie found herself compelled to address the growing mental health crisis not only by sharing her story with her church, but also by getting her congregation more involved. The church’s board of deacons was persuaded to take immediate action to address the suicide crisis.

Because deacons in the Presbyterian tradition are called to a ministry of “compassion, witness, and service,” the board voted to designate the church’s share of the Peace & Global Witness Offering to support the New Jersey Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, an organization in which Natalie had participated for years.

Natalie’s personally moving experience resonates anew during the pandemic, and underlines the importance of this work. “Sadly, and tragically, our community has lost more people to suicide in 2020 than it has to COVID-19,” said Natalie.

Through the Peace & Global Witness Offering, congregations are encouraged and equipped to find and address the anxiety and discord that is prevalent throughout world. The offering supports ministries that work for reconciliation and facilitate healing. Half of the Peace & Global Witness Offering goes to the national church to address these issues around the world, 25% is retained by congregations for local peace and reconciliation work, and 25% goes to mid councils for similar ministries on the regional level. And as you may be aware, our own church has used/will use our portion of the offering for Bright Start Childcare.

Natalie has a message to share with us all during these unsettled times. She reminds us to “listen and look for the light, and remember that you have a purpose, too. God is with you.”

Let us pray:

Loving God, when we walk in the valley of the shadow, remind us that we are only steps from your light. Draw nearer to life, by the arms of our shared ministry, all who feel hopeless, lost, or deserted into your loving embrace, into the warmth of your sight. Amen.