

“Living the Questions” of Ambiguous Loss with Krista Tippett interviewing Pauline Boss

Tippett: What is the most skillful, reality-based way of being helpful to others right now?

Boss: It's hard to say, because one is constricted. But I'm not a Luddite. I've learned to use technology pretty well. And I find that that's a saving grace at this period of time, the internet, the Zooms, the FaceTimes. If it weren't for that, I don't know — it would be much worse, I think. So that's one thing: stay in touch with friends, with family, in the ways that you can. Have your rituals. Rituals are very important, by the way. I have gone to a funeral-memorial service on Zoom, and it was extremely moving. And there are weddings that are being done in different ways, and graduations. We have to have our rituals, and we have to help each other do that, because without the rituals, we're going to lose meaning in the events of our lives, the good ones and the bad ones.

And so, some of us, some people are not so big on birthday parties and this kind of thing, and those of us who are, that's one way of helping. And there's small things: put a plate of cookies in front of someone's door. People have done that for me. They go to the farmers market, because I can't, and so they put some carrots on my door. Those are kindnesses that will help us get through all this. We have to keep in touch with one another, because we're social beings, in ways that we can...

I like this as an opener: “It's nice to see you,” because we're not seeing anybody. By the way, even if it's on Zoom or something, FaceTime, I say that. And of course, I say, “How are you?” It's just a habit we all have. I think the question isn't so bad. What makes it empty is, people don't listen. They don't really want the answer, and so they're not patient enough to listen to the answer. That's what we have to change. We have to listen to the answer.

I asked that of a friend, and she wasn't well. She had major surgery that I didn't know about. So what can you do? You have to listen and empathize. By the way, speaking of empathy: if nothing else, I hope this population in this country has grown more empathy than we had before, for one another, because we were so busy flying by each other, doing our thing. And now I hope we notice each other more; that we become more community-oriented and not just so individual-oriented, which makes those kinds of questions empty.

<https://onbeing.org/programs/living-the-questions-its-really-settling-in-now-the-losses-large-and-small>

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