There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.

A time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build.

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance . . .

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4
The act of simply listening can be a remarkable gift

By SUSAN CABIN

“We are not primarily put on this earth to see through one another, but to see one another through.”

These words, by Peter De Vries, an American author and satirist, resonate with me.

A while back, I went through a period of deep depression. I know we all have those days when we just don’t want to get up and would rather pull the covers up over our heads, but I felt that way for weeks and then months.

I always believed that I could survive almost anything, but my depression was insidious. It grew daily. I could see no end in sight and had very little hope. I couldn’t work or do most of my usual activities, but I continued to go to church and pray.

My faith pulled me through some of the darkest moments of my life when doctors and therapists were not enough. Father John McKenna helped me to understand that God would always give me what I needed even in my darkest times, by quoting the Gospel of Matthew 25:35-36:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.”

When someone has a baby, a heart attack, a stroke, cancer or a death in their family, people come out of the woodwork to help. They send cards, bring meals, offer prayers and other forms of assistance. But when someone has depression or another mental illness or behavioral health issue, people often do nothing because they don’t know what to do.

It’s not that they don’t want to help, it’s just that unless they can relate through experience — either their own or that of someone close to them — they may not know what to do or how to help.

What helped me the most were those friends and family members who did not forget about me or run away from me when things were bad. I believe that God provided me with exactly what I needed...
when I needed it. Someone to listen to me — just to listen. Not to solve my problems or give advice, but to listen.

I needed to hear that I mattered to people. Just someone saying: “It’s good to see you today,” was sometimes all I needed. Just to be noticed. One of my best friends would call all the time, not asking, “Are you all right?” — a question I sometimes couldn’t answer — but, “What do you need?”

The best thing for me was to know that someone cared, that I mattered to someone. I did not expect my friends to fix me, but I needed them to be there for me. Sometimes it’s hard to just listen and not offer a solution. But just by being there for someone — letting them know you care and that you’re thinking about them — really can help.

If you haven’t seen someone in a while at church, reach out. Send a card or an e-mail just to say, “Hi.” It may seem overwhelming to get enmeshed in the life of someone who is very ill, but that’s not what I needed. I have doctors and therapists for that. I needed to know that someone cared about me. I want to be seen as a good mother, grandmother, sister, co-worker and friend who can handle life. That’s all.

We can all help to pull each other through even the worst times if we are just there for each other. The smallest gesture can help. If someone seems to not be himself, instead of asking, “What’s wrong?” instead try, “What do you need?”

But remember, just by being there and asking how you can help can be an incredible gift.

If you or someone you care about has a behavioral health issue and needs assistance, call Pittsburgh Mercy’s Care Center at 1-877-637-2924. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Pittsburgh Mercy is also an approved provider of mental health first-aid training for adults, youths and veterans. For information, call 412-320-2321.

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