




# Joy, Grief, and the Personal Unknown

The Unnerving Ambiguity of Life

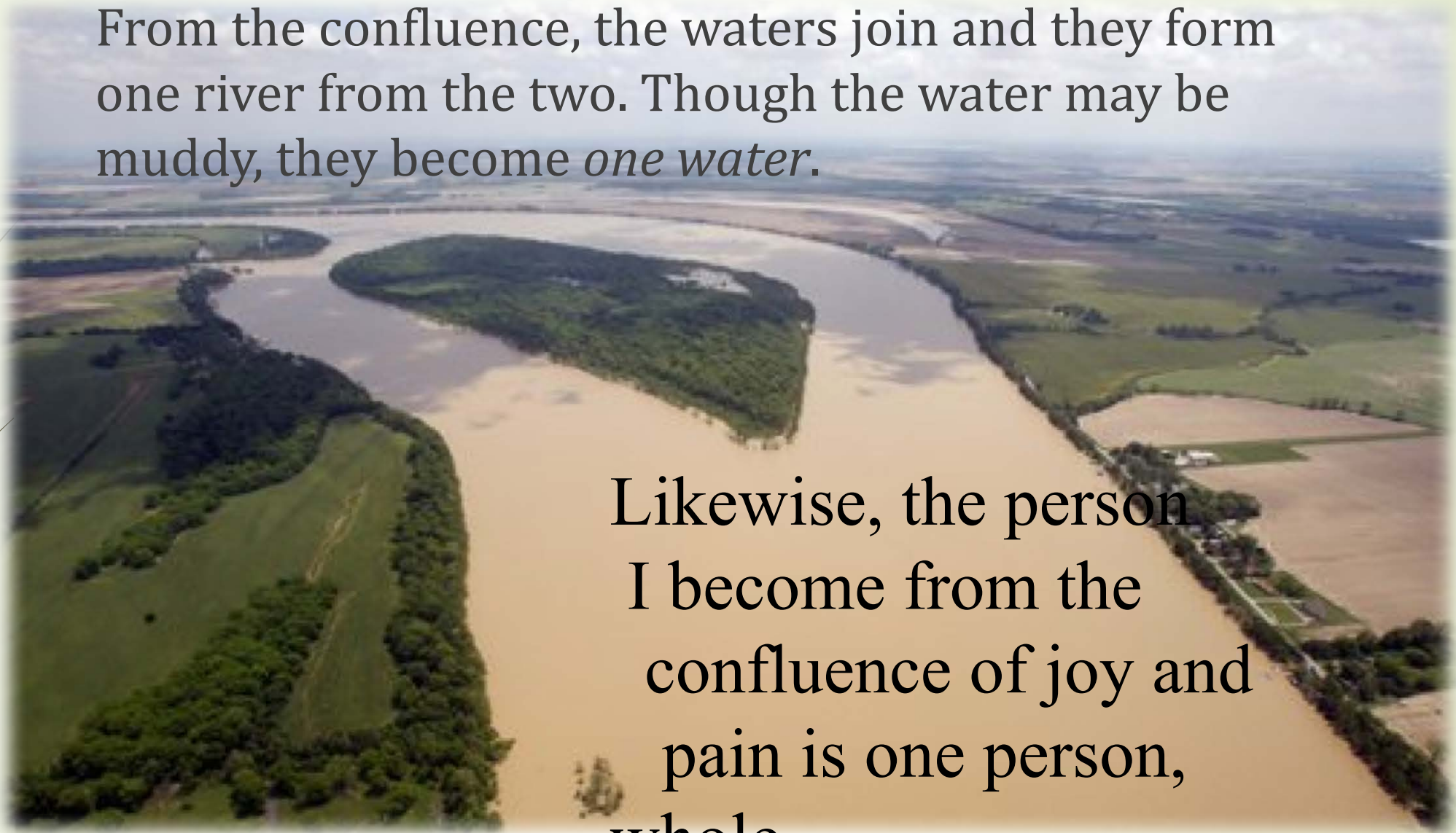
An aerial photograph showing a river confluence. The river on the left is dark and clear, while the river on the right is a muddy brown. A large, forested island is in the middle. A red arrow points from the left edge of the image towards the text.

The South Mississippi River is known for its muddy brown color, but it gets that color from the Missouri River which enters the Mississippi just above St Louis. A confluence is the joining of two rivers, and has come to describe any mixture of factors to form something else.

Pictured here is the confluence of the Drava and Danube Rivers in Croatia

This image shows the confluence of three waterways in Passau, Germany: the Ilz, Danube, and Inn Rivers, flowing from there as the Danube



An aerial photograph showing a wide river with a large, green island in the center. The river flows from the top of the frame towards the bottom right. The surrounding landscape is a mix of green fields and brownish soil. The sky is overcast.

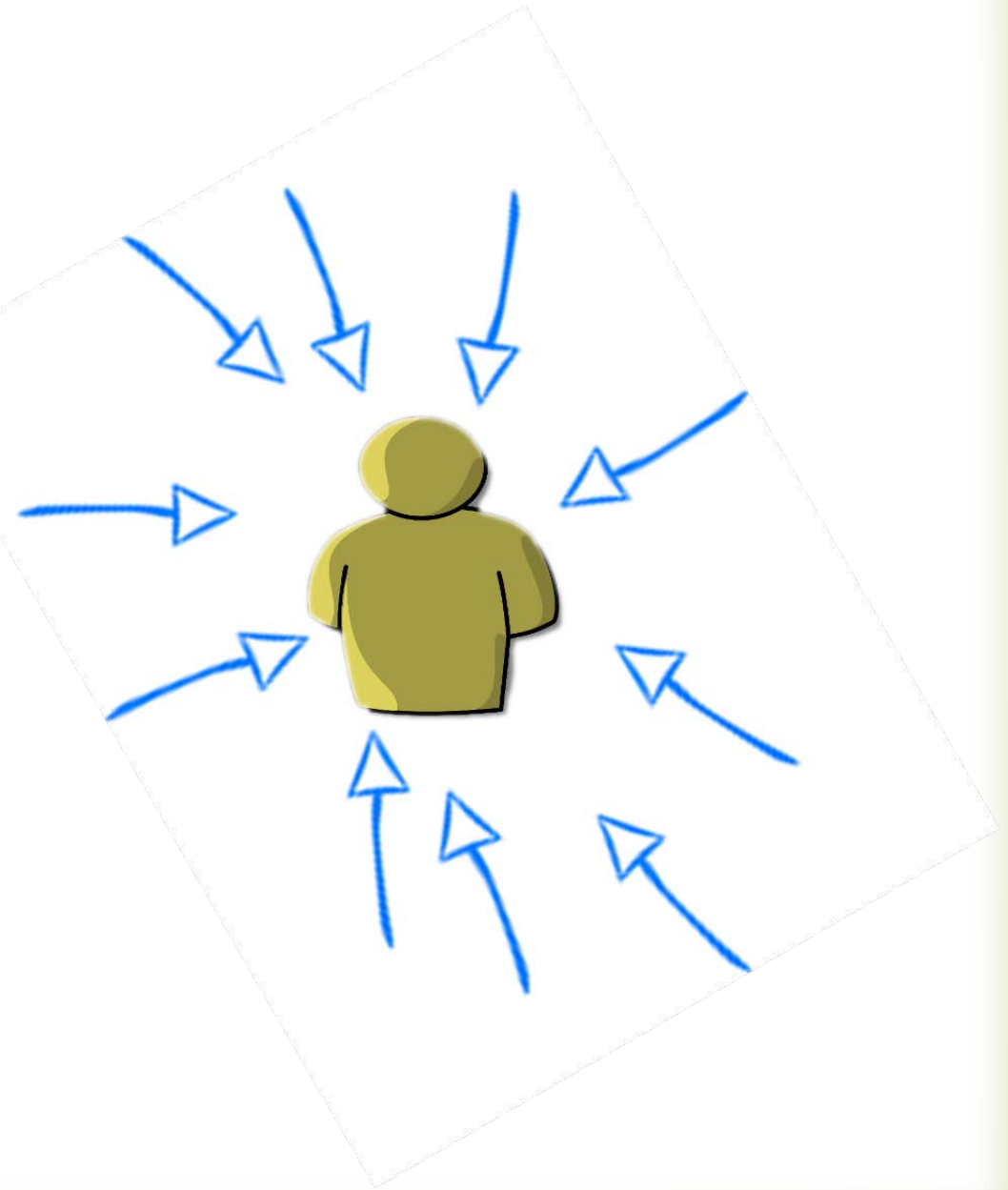
From the confluence, the waters join and they form one river from the two. Though the water may be muddy, they become *one water*.

Likewise, the person  
I become from the  
confluence of joy and  
pain is one person,  
whole.



Our lives are an incredible confluence of joy and pain that come in so many different forms and expressions.

Just like the waters of the river experience various kinds of movement, so do the waters of our lives. Even in one section of the river, different waters are moving at different speeds. Various currents are formed and various pools within the river. And the same happens as we process our myriad experiences and feelings.



Our experiences come in different seasons, and in different contexts. Sometimes one aspect takes on greater significance than others.



There are times (to borrow from ancient wisdom), times for adjustment and times for resolve, a time for tears and a time for joy, a time to be “strong,” a time to let someone else be “strong” for me, a time for grief, a time for celebration...



Therein we are confronted with:

# The Unnerving Ambiguity of Life







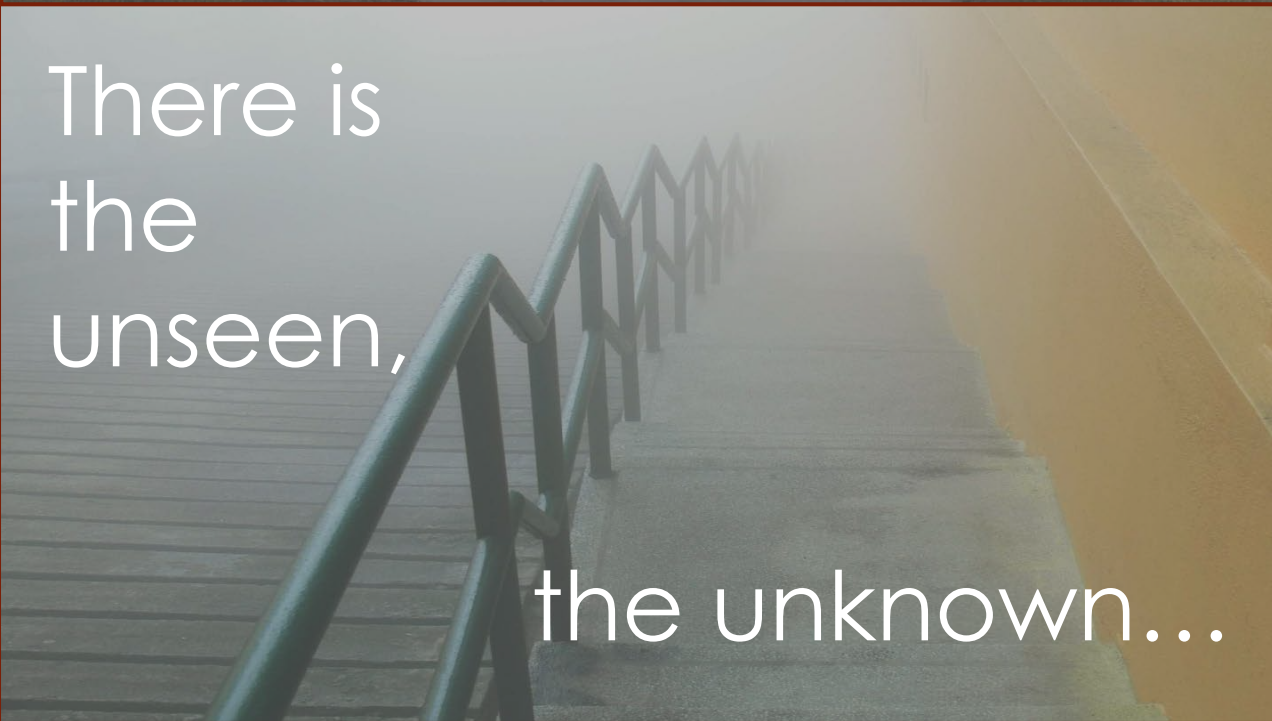
Beyond every bend  
of the river



On the other side  
of every hill



Beyond every  
decision



There is  
the  
unseen,

the unknown...

We encounter the possibility of joy



Or the  
possibility  
of  
pain/grief



**We simply cannot know  
what lies ahead-**

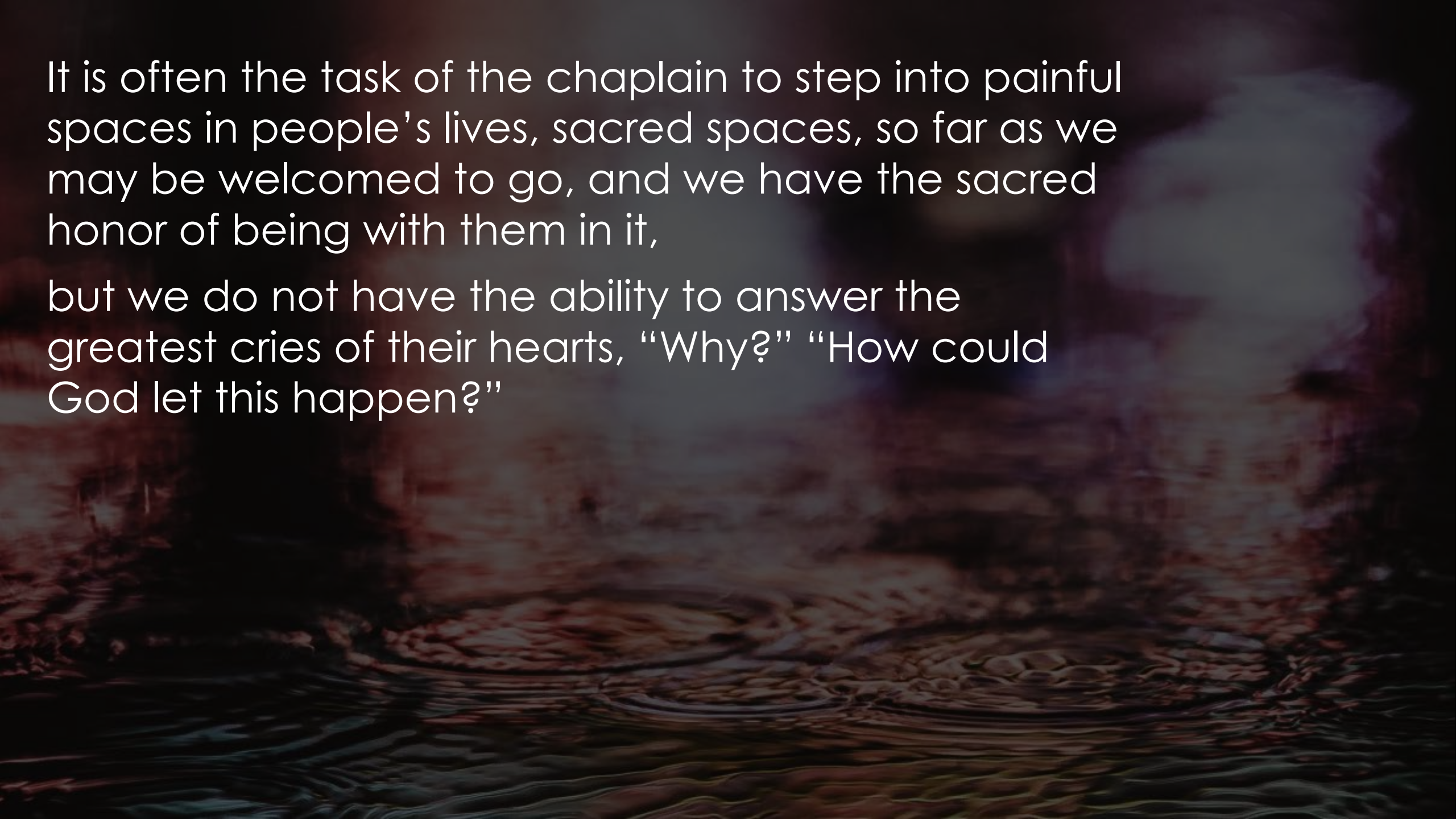
**the next year,**

***or even the next phone call***



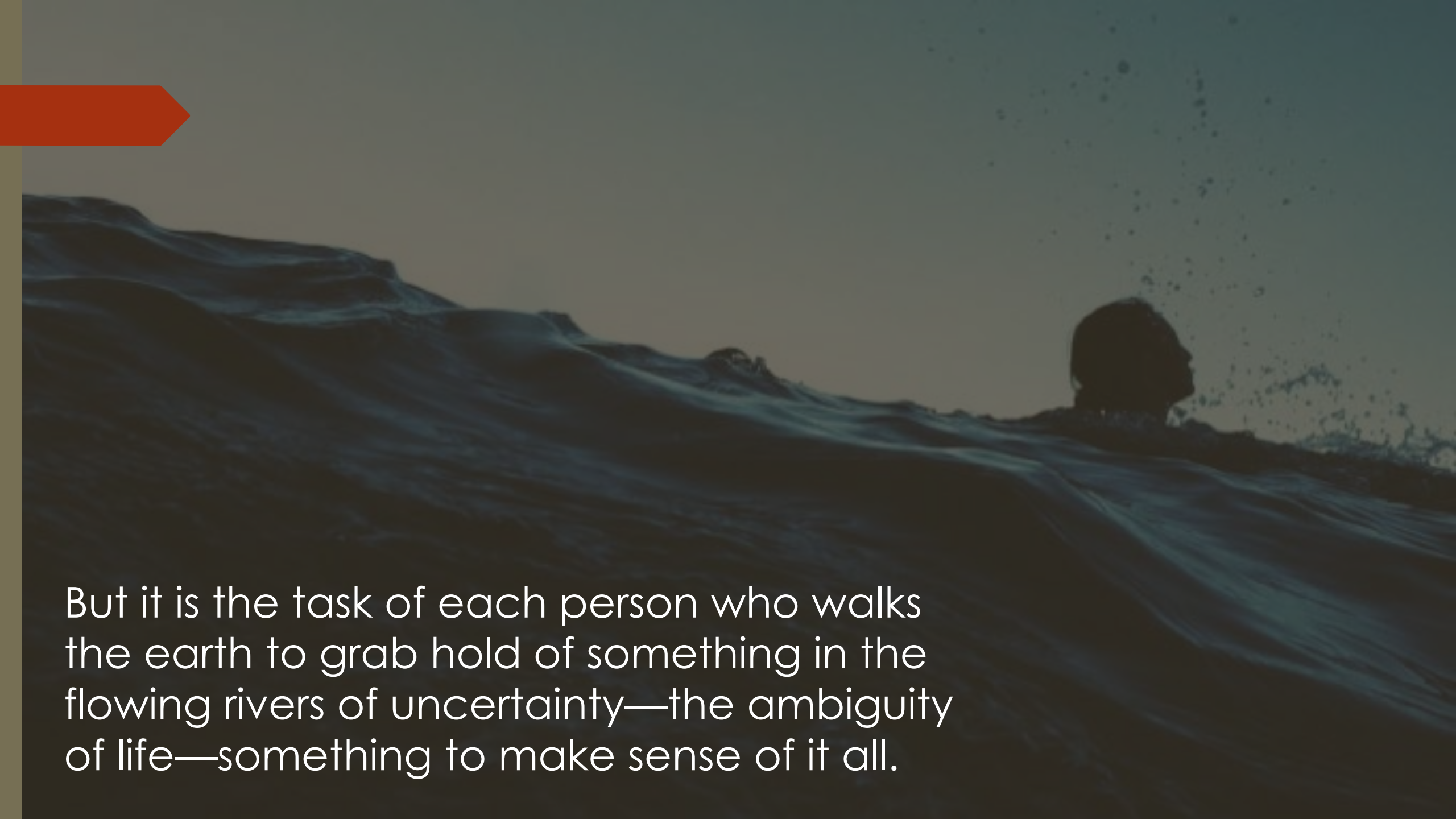
What I am calling  
“*the unnerving  
ambiguity—or  
uncertainty—of life*”  
is simply a way of  
expressing how often it  
is beyond our capacity  
to make sense of life, of  
why things happen as  
they do, unnerving  
because it might shake  
us to the core.



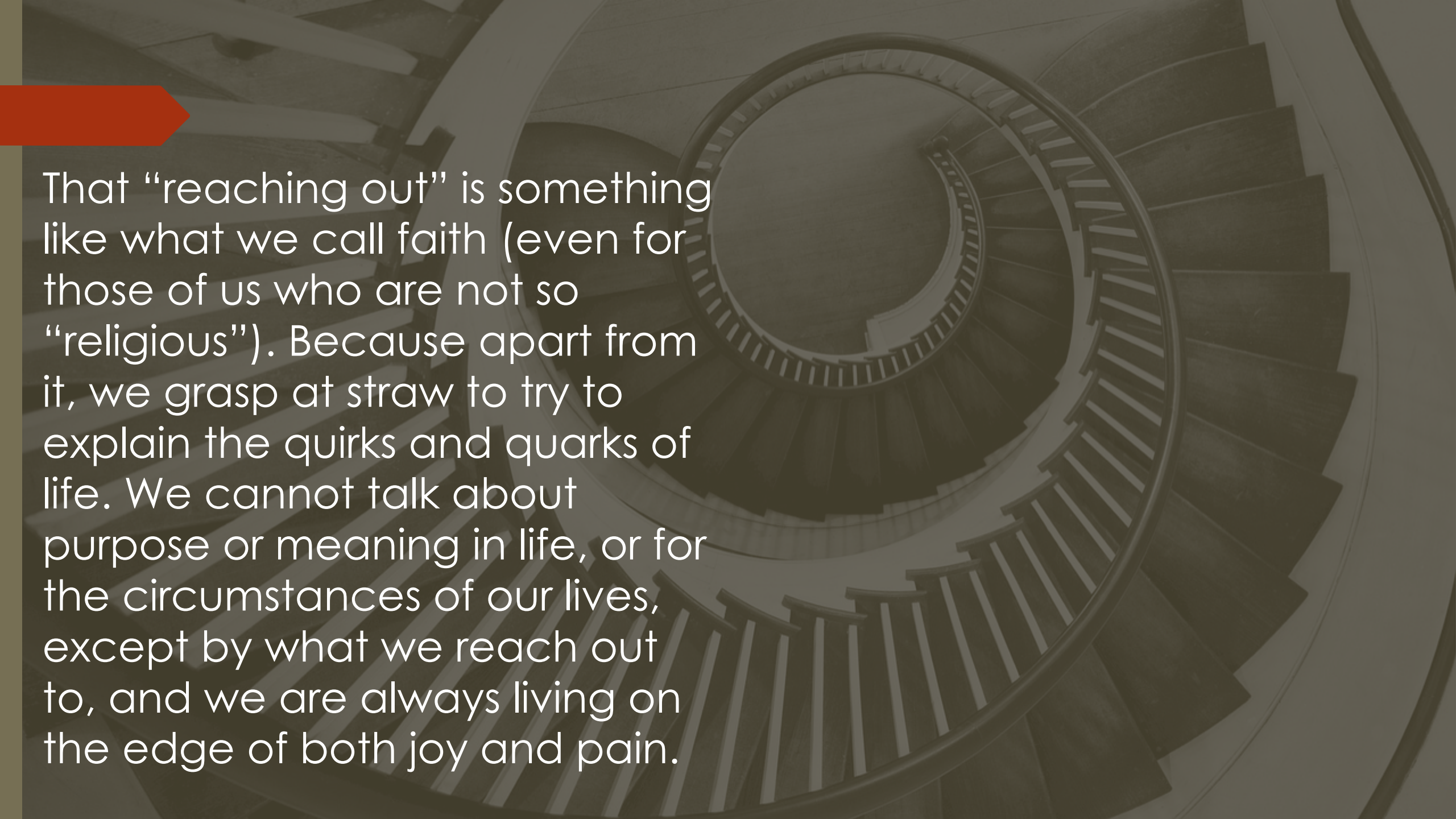


It is often the task of the chaplain to step into painful spaces in people's lives, sacred spaces, so far as we may be welcomed to go, and we have the sacred honor of being with them in it,

but we do not have the ability to answer the greatest cries of their hearts, "Why?" "How could God let this happen?"



But it is the task of each person who walks the earth to grab hold of something in the flowing rivers of uncertainty—the ambiguity of life—something to make sense of it all.



That “reaching out” is something like what we call faith (even for those of us who are not so “religious”). Because apart from it, we grasp at straw to try to explain the quirks and quarks of life. We cannot talk about purpose or meaning in life, or for the circumstances of our lives, except by what we reach out to, and we are always living on the edge of both joy and pain.



And above all, we do not have the slightest assurance of what lies on the other side of life, except what we reach out to by faith. Thus we face a coming to grips with the unnerving ambiguity of life—both the joy and the pain of it.





What,  
Then, Shall  
We Do  
with Pain  
in Life?



# The Pain Scale

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA4mKdVXHmM>  
(Brian Regan Emergency Dept)

# Pain of Life- emotional, physical, spiritual pain

We normally avoid pain. If the river represents pain, we would do anything to stay out of it. Emotional pain can sometimes cause as much anguish as physical pain, and can last much longer.

But as much as we would wish to avoid pain, it has a way of finding us



And so we develop coping strategies, ways of dealing with it

The old normal



Adjustment

The new normal



- ▶ What *is* life? What does it mean to be alive?
- ▶ What is the *value* of life: in general, and for me particularly?
- ▶ What *gives* life value?
- ▶ What gives my life *meaning*/purpose?
- ▶ What are the *core values* for my own life?



# Which words here have the most significant affect on you, either for good or for bad?

What is it about those words?  
Are there words that needs to be added?  
Are there words here you want to destroy?  
Are there words here that you want to treasure?  
Some that you want make bigger, some that you want to make smaller?

## Reflect on a word that affects you.

Like, what does strength mean? What kinds of strength?  
What does it mean to feel weak?  
How do you know when you're feeling strong/weak?  
Are there words that I hide from?  
How has pain affected me? What kinds of pain?  
What does wholeness or shalom mean for me?











**(These are the same words as before, easier to read)**

love peace joy life faith connection freedom stuck  
angry anger happy sad acceptance denial bargaining  
scared fear strength weak guilt forgiveness shame shock  
optimism pessimism shalom serenity trust determination  
anxiety worry stress awe annoyed party coping  
adjusting tears smile hug healing heal dying cure  
content satisfied embarrassed rewarding spirit soul fiery  
hope proud good bad better worse overwhelmed  
worthy unworthy confident hiding secure insecure  
relaxed resolve resting settled tired energized isolated  
caredfor uncaredfor understood misunderstood jealous  
why discouraged depressed lonely intimate nurture  
respect excited helpless hopeless rejected castdown  
liftedup wholeness meaning value pain grief



# Picture Collage

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIQOKtWuz8A&feature=youtu.be>