

Sermon: Jesus Wept. John 11:1-42 March 6, 2022 Lent 1

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What is the shortest verse in the Bible? We read it a moment ago. The sermon title really gives it away. "Jesus wept."

Jesus arrives at the home of his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Jesus, we know from Luke's gospel, was a frequent visitor to their home. Only this time, Jesus comes not for a meal or for friendly conversation ... now his friend Lazarus is dead. Jesus stands before his friend's tomb. And the gospel says: "Jesus wept."

Jesus wept. Can you remember the last time that you wept? Fredrick Beuchner has written that it would help us if we kept track of the times and events that brought tears to our eyes:

"•They may be happy moments or sad ones. •We may cry at a wedding or a funeral. It may be at time when we don't expect it that tears form in our eyes... "

Beuchner suggests that we pay attention to those times when we weep. Tears show the emotional hot spots in our lives. They show us what we value. They penetrate the veneer of hardness that we develop and reveal the soft places within. And he writes: "The times when we weep are like windows through which the light of God's love comes ... and how quickly we close those windows of weeping for fear someone will see inside of us, see us when we are not in control ..." So, check the times and places when you weep says Beuchner, and you will see the places where God is getting through to you.

Jesus wept. When did you last weep? Being a 1st century Palestinian Jesus was free to weep. It was acceptable and expected behavior for a man to weep at the death of his friend. Jesus could feel free to weep loud and long. It was normal behavior in his time and place.

In the dominant culture of early 21st century Canada, weeping is not so acceptable. We are uncomfortable when others weep, and often do not feel free to cry ourselves.

I come from a pretty stoical family culture. People in my extended family are not emotionally demonstrative. They do not weep much. But I remember, years ago, as my grandparents celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, my grandfather wept when he thanked his family for coming ... just for a moment he wept. You could feel the discomfort in the room. He was not a man to lose control. But in truth, maybe we all should have wept with him. It was a special occasion; a time to let feelings come out. ..

I don't know when you last shed tears, but a natural place to weep is here in church. Here we weep for joy, weep for love ones lost... Baptisms, weddings, funerals, memorials – all may bring tears. Music shared can bring a tear to our eyes as musical piece or a soloist touches a deep chord within. Gathering online, in the sacred space a tear may come too. When we gather deep speaks to deep. So we may weep.

It may be that there are times in worship when, as Beuchner says, God opens a window to let his love in and we feel moved to tears. And maybe that is how it should be.

Deep in the Hebrew Scriptures there is a book that is not read as often as some others: Lamentations. It is a book of weeping. It is traditionally thought to have been written by the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. It is a funeral song written at the destruction of Jerusalem. In 597 BCE the Babylonians destroyed the city; they deported all the able bodied citizens to Babylon where they lived in exile for 50 years. Seeing the tragedy unfold Jeremiah cries out "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?"

There are times when things are so difficult for us, when sorrow is so great that we are distressed that others do not seem to share in our feelings and concern and sadness. I know a woman who lost her child and who remarked in the days that followed that it seemed strange that the world did not stop at her daughters passing. Didn't the world share her pain? She felt no one understood her loss. "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" might have been her words. She needed, more than anything, for people to weep with her

Seeing the destruction in Ukraine, mechanized violence unleashed by a powerful madman we may feel like crying. We watch this terrible event as a people worn down by 2 years of pandemic and restrictions and worry. In the time of COVID tears may rise up in us. As we look on the struggles of friends facing illness, or loss. perhaps we need to hear the words shouted by Jeremiah: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by." If we care maybe we can let ourselves weep...

There is the story of a little girl who stayed out much longer than she was supposed to ... When she got home her mother was upset and asked for an explanation. She said that one of her friends broke her favourite doll and she stopped and helped her fix it-for 2 hours. Her mother asked how they had fixed the doll and she innocently replied: "I could not fix the doll, but I sat down with her and helped her cry. "Sometimes all we can do is weep with those who weep.

Jesus wept. He wept over the death of his friend, Lazarus. Jesus wept out of love, compassion, sympathy, sorrow ... Medieval theologians liked to argue over how many times Jesus wept. They knew for sure about 3 times: in the text today; in Luke where he weeps over Jerusalem – the city that would reject him - and then in Gethsemane, in the garden at night, alone. When terrible things happen and we are moved to tears it's good to know that Jesus weeps. In our sadness Jesus weeps with us. In our sorrow God weeps too.

Jesus weeps. And Jesus brings an end to weeping. He called his friend out from the tomb. He brought Lazarus back from death to life. In the Revelation to John we hear of a place where Jesus is - where every tear is wiped away-a place where there will be crying and sadness and death no more. No more crying. Except maybe tears of joy.

AMEN