

November 7, 2021

Texts: Isaiah 25: 5-9; John 11: 32-44

Title: "Jesus Wept"

Today on this All Saints' Sunday, we remember those who have served God on earth and now enjoy His company in Heaven. This isn't meant to be a day of sorrow, although we acknowledge our grief, but we know that because Christ lives, we, too, shall live along with those who have gone before us. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "...we don't want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." He's not telling them that Christians don't grieve. Rather he's telling them not to "grieve like those who have no hope."

Philip Yancey in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, writes about Christians from a certain part of Africa who never say of their dead that they have "lost" that person as we often do. Instead, they announce with joy that their loved ones "have arrived" in Heaven.

Today's gospel reading from John chapter 11 involves Jesus and his closest friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Jesus was teaching one day a couple of miles from Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus resided when word came to him that Lazarus was sick and would probably die. Instead of going at once to Lazarus, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. He wasn't far away. He could have made the trip in less than an hour.

Now how would you feel if a loved one went to the emergency room and had to wait forty-eight hours for the doctor to show up and that when by the time he did,

your loved one would have already died. In this case there are hints that there was a purpose in Jesus' delay.

When Jesus finally arrived. Lazarus was already dead for several days. It was tough. It was very hard for Jesus to see such grief and anger on the part of his good friends that Jesus had not come sooner. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Wow! And hard for Jesus to hear. And when Mary came and fell at his knees it was just too much to take. That's quite a statement of faith for Martha to make. And then Mary came, grieving uncontrollably. She fell at his knees and said the same thing, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." And all the people there were also weeping and wailing.

And then that famous verse often translated in two words, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Most of you're aware that "Jesus wept" is the shortest verse in the Bible.

But do we understand that it's also one of the most powerful verses in the Bible? I remember a youth group that had a running joke about quoting "Jesus wept" as an example of their memorization ability. Here's why that little verse is so powerful.

First of all, it shows Jesus' human side. Anybody who's ever been hurt knows what it is to cry, unless we're one of those people who've learned to smother any show of emotion which of course is a very unhealthy practice.

Tears are a natural, healthy response to deep hurt. It might have been healing for some of the witnesses in the crowd mourning Lazarus' death when they saw Jesus break down and weep as well? "See how he loved him!" they said. And Jesus did

love Lazarus, just as he loves you and me. His tears are a reminder of the depth of his love for all God's children.

Jesus' tears not only help us relate to him, but it shows us how able he is to relate to our experience when we suffer the death of someone we care about.

It hurts when we stand by the grave of someone we love.

Dr. Robert M. Bowman tells a story that comes from a nurse in a cancer ward. Her name is Nan Pinkston. Nan's story is about a young woman named Rebekah who was admitted to her ward. Only 32 years old with eyes that sparkled and a ponytail that bounced as she talked, Rebekah had been diagnosed two weeks earlier with breast cancer. She was accompanied to the hospital by her husband, Warren, and their three daughters—Ruthie, age six, Hannah, age four and Molly, age two.

When they were finally alone, Nurse Pinkston explained to Rebekah that she needed to place a needle in her arm to give her the prescribed chemotherapy. It was then that Rebekah confessed she was terrified of needles, but, she would allow the nurse to inject her because she needed to live for her girls. When the kindly nurse began to inject the dreaded needle Rebekah began reciting, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Afterward Rebekah asked Nurse Pinkston what her favorite Bible verse was. "John 11:35," her nurse replied. "Jesus wept."

Rebekah was surprised—it seemed such a sad verse. Nurse Pinkston explained that it comforted her to know that Jesus is sad when bad things happen to his people. It also demonstrates a human side to Jesus, she said, that helps her when

she cares for sick people.

Eighteen months later it was evident that the treatments Rebekah was receiving were not stopping the spread of the cancer. One day Nurse Pinkston entered Rebekah's room and found it cluttered with paper, and these little cassette tapes they used to use for personal recordings. Rebekah explained that the tapes were for her three daughters. She wanted to share with them some words of wisdom to help them deal with her death. She wanted them to know how much she loved them. She explained to them that she was going to live with God and help Him get a home ready for them for when they were very old when they would see her again.

Then as the end got very close, Rebekah asked the nurse to help her make one last audio tape. She said it was the most important tape of all. "On this last tape this dying young mother spoke her last words to her daughters whom she loved so much. She said she hoped that they wouldn't be sad for long. Then she closed with these words: 'Jesus cried. He knows how sad you are and he knows you will be happy again. I love you so much, Hannah, Ruthie, and Molly. Big hugs, your first mommy.'" Rebekah died two days later.

Rebekah was right. Jesus' tears not only show us his human side, but they also tell us that Jesus knows how sad we are when we lose someone we love. That's a good thing to remember as we celebrate All Saints' Sunday. We grieve for them, but not as those who have no hope. And one day we will be united with them in our eternal home. Amen.