



Lent 5A 3/29/20
The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Church, Needham, MA

Oh LORD: May your word only be spoken, and your word only be heard: In the Name of Jesus Christ the Living Word. Amen.

Jesus began to weep.

What words of Scripture could be a better introduction to this time that we are encountering together?

What verse from the Bible could be a better consolation than to know that God weeps, too?

What description of Jesus' actions could be a better affirmation of God's solidarity with us?

There is so much to grieve in this moment—

There is the mounting death toll of the virus around the world;

There are the unprecedented number of jobless claims
pouring into unemployment offices;

There are the trips and graduations and weddings, and especially, funerals that will
not take place in the way they need to;

There is the loss of the physical gatherings for worship and prayer in churches and
mosques and synagogues and temples and homes, those very gatherings that make
times like these bearable;

There is the loss of our traditional Holy Week and Easter celebrations.

There is the grief of being stuck in our houses and apartments, of being deprived of
simple pleasures like going to Sudbury Farms and feeling safe;

There is the grief of the shut-down of travel that keeps us from being physically with
loved ones.



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There is the grief from the closing of senior centers and the isolation that leads to depression;

There is the grief at losing a life of freedom of movement, of independence;

There is the grief at the incompetence and exploitation of some of the responses to the pandemic.

Many of us have experienced at least one, if not more, of these griefs personally.

Grief in this time is a completely natural response.

I came across an article in the Harvard Business Review this week entitled [That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#). It is an interview with David Kessler, who worked with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her seminal work on death and dying. Kessler says that we're feeling a number of different griefs:

“We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way, and we realize things will be different.The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air...we're also feeling anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is that feeling we get about what the future holds when we're uncertain. There's something bad out there. With a virus, this kind of grief is so confusing for people. ... We're feeling that loss of safety. I don't think we've collectively lost our sense of general safety like this. Individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this. But all together, this is new. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.”

https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief?fbclid=IwAR2jMGSA82wXyQZOQT4qxWSuDddNMhMSUyujGq7_H-tsaVzwxWxbNwd6hxs

Grieving and tears are a part of the Biblical story that we ourselves inhabit and extend.

People cry all throughout the Bible: Jacob and Esau; King Saul and King David; Joseph and Job; Naomi and Ruth; the Widow of Nain; the Prophets; Peter and Paul; and more...



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In the Jewish tradition there is even a midrash about the very first tear.

Midrash is the Jewish tradition of creative interpretation of Scripture.

Midrash begins with a Biblical text then uses the God-breathed imagination to bring new life to those texts, reading between the lines, so to speak.

Here is a midrash about the first tear:

“Adam and Eve had just sinned in the Garden of Eden. Now they had to suffer the consequence for their disobedience. God told them they would have to leave their blessed home and no longer enjoy their divinely blessed environment. But as a sign of God’s love they were given a special gift so that they might bear their punishment. Together with their exile came this blessing: ‘I have driven you out of the Garden of Eden and now you are about to enter into a world of sorrow and trouble, the like of which staggers the imagination. However, I want you to know that My benevolence and My love for you will never end. I know that you will meet with a much tribulation in the world, and that it will embitter your lives. For this reason, I give you out of My heavenly treasure this priceless pearl. Look! It is a tear! And when grief overtakes you and your heart aches so that you are not able to endure it, and great anguish grips your soul, then there will fall from your eyes this tiny tear. Then your burden will grow lighter.’ ”

<https://www.aish.com/j/as/Cryfest-This-Is-Us.html>

We ourselves have likely experienced the truth of the adage of having a good cry.

Biology confirms this: crying removes toxic stress hormones, cleanses the eyes, kills bacteria, releases endorphins.

Jesus confirms all this psychology, and biology, and theology this morning.

But *why* is Jesus crying?

It’s not so clear as it may appear.

Jesus could be crying because his friend Lazarus has died.

But then why did he choose to wait 2 days before going to see Lazarus?



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And as we know, he has the power to raise people from death—for example, he raises the son of the widow of Nain, according to the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus could be crying out of frustration because his friends and other onlookers don't get the significance of what is unfolding before him.

But elsewhere in John, Jesus does not get so upset with people's obtuseness.

Jesus' tears come amidst a bundle of emotions.

The emotions Jesus expresses here are the most intense attributed to him anywhere in the Gospels.

Depending on the translation, Jesus is described as angry, disturbed, perturbed, deeply troubled, deeply moved, indignant.

Then Mary says to him "Come and see."

And Jesus begins to weep.

Elsewhere in John, "Come and see" is the invitation to discipleship with Jesus.

But here, "come and see" is an invitation for Jesus to gaze on Lazarus' death
and see a foreshadowing of his own.

The Raising of Lazarus is the catalyst for the religious authorities to begin to conspire to bring Jesus to his own death.

It's likely that Jesus knew something like this could happen-
in a very real way, he signs his own death warrant.

No one wonder he hesitated to come immediately at the entreaty of his dear friends.

No wonder the intense complexity of his emotions.

In facing Lazarus' death, he is facing his own.



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Though we stand nearly at the end of the season of Lent, you will recall the first scandalous claim of our faith, the claim we celebrated at Christmas:

That God became fully human in the form of Jesus: The Incarnation.

The complexity of his tears confirms the reality of the Incarnation.

No attribute more fully displays the complexity of our humanity than tears. Though primates and elephants cry, we are unique in the variety and depth of reasons that we cry.

Jesus weeps for Lazarus' death, his own life, for the incomprehension and love of his friends, for the hatred of those who misunderstand.

The writer Debbi Thomas gives many reasons why Jesus' tears are so important. I want to share just a couple that moved me:

“When Jesus weeps, he legitimizes human grief. His brokenness in the face of Mary and Martha’s sorrow negates all forms of Christian triumphalism that leave no room for lament... When Jesus weeps, he shows us that sorrow is a powerful catalyst for change. In the story of Lazarus, it is shared lament that leads to transformation. It’s *because* Jesus experiences the devastation of death that he recognizes the immediate need to restore life. It is his shattering that leads to resurrection. Perhaps Jesus’s tears can provoke us in similar ways. What breaks our hearts? What splits us open in sorrow? What enrages us to the point of breakdown? Can we mobilize into those very spaces, even now as the coronavirus changes our world? Can we work for transformation in our places of devastation? Can our sorrow lead us to justice?”

And, she concludes: “Our journey is not *to* the grave, but *through* it. The Lord who weeps is also the Lord who resurrects. So we mourn in hope.”

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=2577>