

STRUGGLES ON THE JESUS WAY

Grief

John 11:17-45

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

April 6, 2014

AUDIO: <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/163577>

This is not a pretend story. Lazarus, Jesus' friend, has died. This is real death. Real grief. We all encounter a struggle with grief on the Jesus way. Losses are many, and they don't come one at a time. They accumulate. The death of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of status, a pet, our health, a dream and much more. Many of us are acquainted with the so-called stages of grief made famous by the writings of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: denial, bargaining, anger, etc. But recent research is taking a second look. First of all, grief doesn't happen in neat stages. Everyone is different. And most of all, to discuss stages of grief implies we are on a schedule: get over this in X amount of time.

Our real problem is not grief. Grief is normal. Our problem is that we live in a culture that thinks it does not have time to grieve. Grief unacknowledged goes underground. Here's a quote: "A sorrow that has no vent in tears makes other organs weep." What makes this quote remarkable is that it is from Henry Maudsley, an 18th century physician! [*Mourning and Mitzvah*, p. 46]. As we move through this conversation this morning, just remember that tears are a part of loving and all tears matter to God!

Author Lauren Winner was raised as a Jew and grew up attending synagogue regularly. Toward the end of her college career, she became a Christian. In one of her books, she remarks that Christian churches do a good job of proclaiming the hope of Christ at funerals. "What churches do less well," she writes, "is grieve" [*Mudhouse Sabbath*, p. 27]. Historically, the Jews have us beat on this one! Theirs is a fairly elaborate ceremony at the time of death. Immediately after the body was carried out of the house, all chairs were reversed to face the wall and mourners would sit on the floor or on low stools.. In Jesus' day, at least ten people would come as official mourners and in many instances, they wouldn't just come for a visit. They would come and stay (read v. 19). According to the Talmud, the mourning would last 40 days.

I want us to feel--not read about, listen to or simply notice--but really feel Jesus' love in this story. Listen to v. 33. Jesus sees our weeping! Remember? All tears matter to God! In fact, we move in these verses from their grief to Jesus' grief, from their tears to Jesus' tears. Here is Jesus' grief: "Deeply troubled" means groaning violently. "Troubled" means shaken to the depths of his being. And then this shortest verse in the Bible, v. 35: "Jesus wept." Tears of pathos, frustration and indignation. B.B. Warfield says in these verses John uncovers the heart of Jesus. John Calvin wrote that Jesus is not approaching Lazarus' grave as an idle spectator but like a wrestler, preparing for the contest. No wonder Jesus groans, says Calvin! [*The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Gospel According To John, Revised*, Leon

Morris, pp. 494, 496]. Let me ask you. Is there anyone in the entire cosmos who loves you this much, the way Jesus loves?

Grief is strange. It rarely comes alone. Other emotions come with it. Aren't we all a lot like Martha, bringing much bewilderment, anger, faint hope to the accumulated losses of our lives? Note she says in vv. 21-22, "Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died...But even now..." Do you hear it? Anger, confusion and faint hope. But even now. Martha doesn't have it all figured out. But she brings all her grieving, perplexed heart to rest in Jesus. In Jesus, who declared, "I am the resurrection and the life." Not, "I can point the way or have read books about it." Or even, "I have the resurrection." But, "I AM the resurrection and the life."

Perhaps, when it is all said and done, the very best we can do with our pain and grief is entrust them to bigger, stronger, more eternal hands than our own. This doesn't take the grief away. But remember. Grief is a part of loving. And God cares about all of our tears. The Man of Sorrows walks with us. And he knows the way.