

"My Eyes Are Dry"
Following Jesus: Jesus Weeping
John 11:17-37

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/following-jesus-jesus-weeping/>

"And Jesus began to weep..."

Jesus wept. But I could not.

I remember well those weeks and months following my father's death. The tears were brief and held-back, even though I was not consciously trying to hold them back. Doyle checked in on me occasionally, just to see how I was doing. Perhaps he suspected that I hadn't fully grieved and wept.

Since I can easily weep at books and movies, babies and animals, it surprised me. I told Doyle that I wasn't consciously holding back, but for some reason the tears weren't there. I was focused on my mom. How was she going to go on without the love of her life with whom she had spent the past 60 years. He died just 4 days after their 60th anniversary. She was just past cancer treatments--pale and frail and childlike.

Although she did much better than any of us imagined—focusing on all the details of things that needed to be done, still she was ready to go. Life here on this earth no longer held the meaning and joy that it had. Just 80 days after his death we buried her, too.

But even then, I was so accustomed to keeping the grief at bay, that I still shed very few tears. Where were they? Had I in those past few years of ministry become so practiced at "handling" my grief as I sat with those who were dying or in tremendous pain—that I closed off that grief as a way of self-preservation?

About a month after my mother's death, I was sitting at the table one morning writing a check. I had mentioned to friends a few days earlier that my dad's birthday was coming up. It hadn't felt sad. In fact, we all chuckled at a couple of his stories and the way he always enjoyed telling them.

But, as I sat there writing the check and I put the date in. Suddenly the tears began to well up inside me. I began to weep, Deep sobbing gulps of grief overcame me. Grief that I had been suppressing all these weeks and months. Then the phone rang. It was my husband, Keith. It was obvious I was crying. Of course, he was alarmed. "Honey, what's wrong?"

"I'm OK." I blubbered. "I was just writing a check and when I wrote the date in, the tears just started flowing and I can't seem to stop them," I haltingly. He said, "You're finally finding your tears."

Frederick Buechner, writer and theologian, says that it would help us all if we would keep track of the times and events in our lives that bring tears to our eyes. They may be happy or sad moments. It may be at unexpected times and places. But, whenever we are stirred to such depths, these are times that God is at work in our lives. These are the emotional hot spots when something breaks through the veneer of hardness in which we tend to entomb ourselves. They are like windows through which the light of God's love gets in to us.

When we are quick to slam shut those windows we may be cutting ourselves off from God. Buechner also suggests that those who cannot weep may not laugh much either. It is as if those emotions are tied together in the human psyche. When you turn off one, you may be turning off the other, too.

"Jesus began to weep," our text tells us. Of course, we need to look at the rest of the story. It's a familiar one. Jesus had these 3 precious friends who were brother and sisters—Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He frequently stayed in their home and enjoyed their hospitality.

Not long before Jesus' earthly ministry was so abruptly cut off, Mary and Martha frantically sent word to him that Lazarus was very sick. By the time he finally got there, Lazarus had been dead for 4 days.

Traditionally the Jewish bury their dead within 24 hours but there was a tradition that said the soul hovered near the body for 3 days. After that time, there was no hope for resurrection.

No wonder Mary and Martha were so disappointed that Jesus took so long to get there! In fact, they both greeted Jesus with almost exactly the same words: "If you had been here he wouldn't have died!" Was it an accusation? Or a profession of the depth of their faith? Or perhaps a little of both...

When Jesus saw the women weeping and all the other friends who had gathered there weeping, too, verse 33 says that he was "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." One translation says, he "became angry." What was going on in his mind at that moment?

"*Come and see.*" Mary said. "*Come and see,*" words that Jesus had used himself when he was calling some of his disciples: "*Come and see.*" What those disciples were going to see and experience was going to change their lives completely and forever. Now he hears those familiar words again, "*Come and see,*" as she leads Jesus to Lazarus' tomb.

Immediately Jesus began to weep. Not just cry, but weep—wracking, sobbing grief. Over the centuries biblical scholars and theologians have pondered the exact reason of his weeping. Were his tears for his beloved friends and their grief? Was he weeping in frustration that so many he had taught still seemed clueless?

Or could he have been weeping because with those familiar words, "*Come and see*" Mary evoked the realization that this moment in time, this bringing forth of Lazarus, before such a crowd as this, a death and resurrection, would ultimately lead to the inevitable week ahead—a week that would climax in his brutal death on the cross? Was his heart heavy and his grief fueled by the realization that time was running out?

Was his heart broken seeing his dear friends weeping and mourning their loss?

Sometimes things are just beyond our comprehension. Jesus was completely, totally God and Jesus was completely, totally human. We can't quite wrap our finite minds around that, can we? It's not the math we learned! But it's God's math. In our efforts to understand who Jesus is/was, it's easy to tumble into one of 2 ditches. We either think of his humanity like he's our big brother, our pal who looks at our mistakes and gives us a wink and a nod OR we see him as so holy and above all of us that we can't imagine he had our same emotions, our same doubts and fears, our same anguish. But Luke tells us in chapter 22:11: "... being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his **sweat** was

like drops of blood falling to the ground." His human self was tormented at the thought of what lay ahead.

So perhaps it was all of these thoughts and emotions prompting him to express his grief in the most human of reactions—tears?

Lazarus was bound up in death's bindings. Jesus shouted for him to "Come out!" Be free from all that binds you and holds you prisoner! There is life and resurrection to be experienced!

Jesus calls us to "*Come and see.*" Be freed up to live and to bring the life-giving good news to the rest of the world. We are no longer bound by faithless used-to-be's, but are now free and called to be agents of change in a broken and hurting world that often makes us weep.

Every day we are bombarded by images of people in pain, of people who are suffering. If we pay attention to the news or social media we hear conflicting reports of what "really happened, and who is to blame." There's name calling, hatred and hostility spewing out of people's mouths. What are we to make of it?

How do we keep from becoming so angry ourselves that the poison seeps into our very own bodies? How do we keep from becoming numb by the endless ranting and escaping by shoving down the unwanted emotions?

Jesus wept as he observed our brokenness. Do we weep, too, as we see hurting people all around us? Do we weep as we pray for change; pray for justice.

If you do, I'd like to throw out a challenge. I'd like to challenge you to make those tears count for something. I challenge you to slow down and live in the moment; to pay attention to yourself and to your surroundings.

Look around you. What do you see? Who do you see?

Do you see those who have no place to call home; who carry everything they belong in a backpack? Do we engage them on Wednesday night suppers here at the church in order to hear their stories? Can we change the lenses through which we view them? Do we see someone who could be one of our children or grandchildren tomorrow. Can we see a child of God with wants and needs just like us.

Jesus was that rabble-rouser who continually challenged the status quo of the religious community to get outside their comfort zones. It's one of the reasons he was hated to the point of plotting his murder! Spending time with prostitutes and tax collectors was not acceptable. That must have grieved his soul. The people who seemed to love God the most were often those who just didn't get it. They could only see broken rules. They were blind to broken people!

When we allow our life to be intertwined with folks who are different from us, life gets messy! It isn't always easy to have the wisdom to know how to respond to all the issues that come up. It isn't always comfortable, and sometimes you may even weep, but isn't that what Jesus calls us to do? He modeled it every day of his earthly life.

If Buechner's suggestion that perhaps our tears and our laughter are intertwined, then this message would not be complete without some encouragement to find joy in your life, too.

John Pavlovitch is a pastor, author and blogger. He recently blogged about the day his father died and how he found himself in a grocery store shopping for bananas and wondering why in the world he was there! Well, they needed bananas for breakfast the next morning! He saw people going about their business oblivious to the fact that he had just lost his father. For days says he navigated life doing the things that needed to be done, all the while pushing back tears, fighting to stay upright and mostly being seconds away from a "total blubbering freak out." He says he wanted to wear a sign that said: "I JUST LOST MY DAD. PLEASE GO EASY."

And then he noted that everyone around us, in the pew next to you and behind you; in the coffee shop line; in traffic—they are all grieving something. They are missing someone, worried about someone; having a panic attack or scared that people will see what's really going on in their life and they are ashamed and embarrassed. Then 5 years later they are getting bananas still pushing back tears because the loss feels as real as it did that first day. They are wounded, exhausted and pain-ravaged stumbling all around us. We just haven't noticed. Perhaps we haven't noticed when we asked, "How ya doin?" and they said, "Fine. How are you?" with a catch in their voice or with tears in their eyes.

So it's up to you and me to be a little kinder; to pay a little closer attention; to not be afraid to look them in the eye and say, "Can I help?" We may even need to take a moment and weep with them.

So what can we take away today?

- 1) Be present in the moment—pay attention to yourself and to your surroundings. What is there to see? What is there to learn? Who needs a smile and a kind word today? Who has been invisible that I need to really SEE?
- 2) Find a regular time to get outside your own comfort zone, your own safe neighborhood and friends. Read some books that make you weep.
- 3) Find a regular time to pursue joy without guilt. Leisure time that feeds your soul and doesn't have to cost a penny. Time with friends and family who lift you up and make you laugh; enjoy a walk in the beautiful outdoors that God created for your pleasure.
- 4) Carve out 24 hours without criticizing anyone or yourself. Just be thankful that our lavishly generous God loves you, warts and all. Bask in that love and show it to others.
- 5) Give yourself permission to weep and to laugh. Give yourself permission to feel. Don't wallow in your pain or escape in your joy, but own up to your feelings and give them to God.

Acknowledging our heartache and pain with our tears can be scary. Sometimes we feel that if we let ourselves start crying we just won't ever be able to stop. Some of you sitting here today have been experiencing a dull dead time, barely able to feel your emotions, numbed to the pain inside. You've wanted healing and you want real joy to rise up inside you, but it seems inexpressible.

Do you hear the silent cries?

- “I just watched as they led my 19-year-old grandson to prison. Please go easy.”
- “My wonderful spouse of 60 years couldn’t remember the names of our grandchildren last night. It scared me. Please go easy.”
- “I just had my 3rd miscarriage and I’m scared I’m never going to be able to have a baby. Please go easy.”
- “My 11-year-old gets bullied every single day at school. He doesn’t even want to live any more. I’m terrified. Please go easy.”
- “I’m 63 and was just told that they no longer need me at my job anymore. I was counting on that retirement package and no one wants to hire me. Please go easy.”
- “My husband that I thought I would spend the rest of my life with just told me he has found someone else. Please go easy.”
- “That spot I thought was nothing has just been diagnosed as stage 4 cancer. Please go easy.”
- “I felt forced to get a small payday loan to fix my car so I could drive to work and back, but now I owe them over \$3000. I can never get them paid back. Please go easy.”

I first heard Rob Gourley sing a beautiful song with the most haunting words several years ago. “My Eyes Are Dry” beautifully expresses what so many of us feel at times. I’ve asked Rob Gourley to close the message with this song.

Jesus wept. We can weep, too. We *must* weep, too.

My Eyes Are Dry

Keith Green

My eyes are dry
 My faith is old
 My heart is hard
 My prayers are cold
 And I know how I ought to be
 Alive to You and dead to me

But what can be done
 For an old heart like mine
 Soften it up
 With oil and wine
 The oil is You, Your Spirit of love
 Please wash me anew
 With the wine of Your Blood

Songwriters: Keith Gordon Green

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