

September 6, 2009  
 John 11:1- 46  
 Jesus Wept... and So Shall We

After the events of this past week, with Joanne's passing, I felt the scheduled message from Luke on Jesus Six Pronouncements of Woe Upon the Pharisees and Experts in the Law would be a bit out of place.

So I prayed as I went to bed Wednesday night, and the passage I just read is the one that popped into my mind. More specifically, what popped into my mind were the words, "*Jesus wept,*" followed by the additional thought, "*And So Shall We In This World.*"

In this world, where perfection still alludes us, tears are unavoidable. Until the day when sickness and injustice and evil and disease and disaster and death are banished by Jesus (when He returns to consummate the Kingdom at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming) tears will continue to be part of our ongoing life-experience. In a fallen world, we can't escape, the shedding of tears at least on occasion.

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And there should be no shame or stigma attached to that at all, since it was Jesus Himself who sanctified the shedding of tears by weeping at the death of Lazarus. The Jesus who on a prior occasion had said: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" — pronouncing a divine blessing upon those who grieve and mourn in this life.

And it isn't that Jesus merely shed a tear or two. For in today's passage we are told that before He wept "*He was DEEPLY moved in spirit,*" and after He wept (when He stood in front of the tomb) He was "*once more DEEPLY moved.*"

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What does "*deeply moved*" mean? It means that deep inside Him His whole being was emotionally stirred, troubled or disturbed. So much so that people could visibly see or sense, even before He wept, that His whole being was overwhelmed with emotion. This is something John perceived through observation not divine revelation.

Maybe it was the tensing of His facial muscles, or watery eyes, or a voice was noticeably punctuated with sighs, like the person who gets up to speak, and has to stop because the emotion inside them is so strong they need to pause, let it subside, regain their composure, take a deep breath and then try to speak the words they want or need to say.

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That's the **FIRST** thing I need to point out from this text: Jesus was not an emotionless stoic! He was not "duro" as we say in Spanish — hard and impervious to the pain and grief of others.

And I stress that because that's how He's often portrayed — as one unaffected by the emotions we often wrestle with — like anger, laughter and tears. Totally in control at all times — never spontaneous, never engaging in humor, never laughing, and only once crying a tear or two. A person more akin to an alien like Dr. Spock on Star Trek, who couldn't feel or understand human emotion, than one who was divine, yet FULLY HUMAN in every way that we are.

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You see, Jesus was not an insensitive man. He was not of the opinion (like many Christians seem to be) that showing emotion is somehow bad or needs to be repressed, or worse yet, is the thing that drives us to sin.

And I say that because I have spoken with earnest Christian people who somehow felt that if they could just totally repress or numb out all emotion, then they wouldn't be tempted to sin. I can even recall, at one point early on in my own spiritual walk, thinking the same thing — blaming the emotion instead of the idolatry or sin that twisted my emotions.

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Yet the problem is that laying the blame on emotion is a Stoic idea and not a Christian idea! Because scripturally speaking, emotion is not the problem! Sin is! Emotion is a gift from God! God created us with emotions, because those emotions play an integral and necessary aspect in helping us love God and people.

Compassion, empathy, laughter, tears, fondness, the bond of brotherly affection and even anger at evil or injustice are emotions that enable us to fulfill the divine command to “love God and our neighbor as ourselves.”

In fact, to numb out one's emotions is to shut off one of the primary ways God often speaks to and through us. Being a stoic is not an option for the Christian who is called to love God and neighbor with “all their soul,” or with all their emotional faculties.

Thus I say to you (and I say it with the backing of Scripture) emotions aren't to be repressed, or done away with, or numbed to the point of being unable to feel them. They are simply to be guided by Scripture and love and truth and wisdom and reason and godly counsel and the spiritual fruit of self-control.

It isn't emotion that is the problem! It's the sin that twists and distorts and enflames emotion in excessive or unhealthy ways. It's emotion without boundaries, and warped by sin, and twisted by self-interest, and left like children running around a house with no guidance, restrictions or supervision!

Jesus, if we understand this passage correctly, felt things deeply – very deeply. He was a man who stood in the midst of people experiencing deep sorrow and grief, and Himself experienced that same deep sorrow and grief with them. He didn't **REPRESS** His emotions (even in public) He **EXPRESSED** the emotions He felt — because that's what love does! That's how the emotional aspect of love functions.

Paul affirmed that same truth years later (maybe even reflecting back on this event in Jesus life) when in a passage dealing with how *"love must be sincere,"* he would write: *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* Or as we might say today: *"Laugh with those who laugh, and cry with those who cry,"* because that's part of loving with a sincere heart (Rom. 12:15).

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Then **SECONDLY** I need to point out from this passage that Jesus not only wept at the death of Lazarus, He wept at the death of Lazarus even though He knew full well that Lazarus would not remain in death! He wept with Mary and Martha, over the death of their brother, even though He knew that in just a few minutes He would call Lazarus out of the tomb! He wept even though He knew that He could have prevented Lazarus from dying in the first place if He had just gotten there a bit sooner. Mary was right in one sense: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* That much was true. Jesus did delay, and His delay meant that Lazarus would taste death, and his sisters would have to experience the intense grief associated with death.

What does that have to say to us? It tells us that God weeps with us in our painful struggles, and as we wrestle with loss, even though as the All-powerful and Sovereign Lord, He could have intervened or changed the outcome to make it a scenario more in keeping with our desires and our yearnings — just as Mary and Martha wished that He had. He wept with them and He weeps with us, even though He possesses the power and the ability to have made things turn out differently than they did.

You see, like Mary in this passage, don't we sometimes try to replay painful scenarios, and change some of the circumstances in our minds, so that the outcome would have been less painful (sort of like reading one of those books where you have three or four different endings and you can choose the ending you want).

I did that with my dad once I received the call that he had passed away before I was able to get there. I started thinking: If only I'd left an hour earlier, I would have been there with him when he passed away. / If only God had made the weather sunny instead of incessant torrential rains up the whole east coast, I could have gotten there leaving at the time I did.

If I hadn't had that coffee or stopped to use the rest room... / If only (as we later discovered)... if only the doctor had correctly diagnosed that he had pneumonia months earlier, and given him the right medication, maybe then he'd still be around. If only... if only... if only....

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In that sense we are very "Mary-like." Because that's what she basically says to Jesus: "If only you had come earlier... If only you had left the moment I told you he was sick... If only you hadn't hesitated and stayed where you were those two extra days after you were told he was sick..."

It was her way of saying, "It's your fault, Jesus, because you could have made things turn out differently than they have." Or maybe even more to the point, she may have been implying: "If you really *loved* him and us, you would have come sooner and spared him from death and us from having to experience its horrible sting."

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Which brings us to the **THIRD** thing we need to see from this text. It is true that Jesus, if He had come sooner, could have spared them from the grief and pain of death. Mary was right. But in another sense, if she was implying that Jesus' hesitation in coming and failure to change the circumstances, was due to the fact that He didn't love Lazarus, she was dead wrong! That is often our natural assumption. We feel that if God loves us He'll spare us of all pain and hardship. But this passage alone is enough to assure us it's an assumption believers need to erase from their brains!

Because John couldn't make it any clearer that Jesus LOVED Lazarus! In verse 3 we read of Mary and Martha saying what they knew from seeing the special relationship Lazarus had with Jesus: "*Lord, the one you love is sick.*"

And in verse 5 we see it affirmed again, only this time it is said by John and includes Mary and Martha: "*Jesus,*" says John expressing the truth we need to know if we are to correctly interpret the story, "*loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*" Mary didn't just think it was true, it was true. Jesus loved them all in a very special way.

John won't let us get into the meat of the story before we have that truth firmly established in our minds! Which means Jesus' hesitation or staying put after he finds out Lazarus is sick, **HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH A LACK OF LOVE** — neither for Lazarus nor his two sisters. He deeply loves both the one He allows to die and the two sisters who have to watch him die.

If you get nothing else out of this message I would hope that that is the one point alone sticks out in your mind! Jesus deeply loved this family even though His choice to stay where He was two more days meant they would have to endure the trauma of death, and the heart-wrenching pain of grief and loss.

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And that is hard for us to grasp! Why? Because we tend to think: If Jesus really loves me, why am I so sick? / If God really loves me, why would He allow my illness to be terminal? / And when we pray, or tell Him what we want (like Mary did) why doesn't He immediately respond (like an emergency room doctor) to do what we ask? / If He loves us, why does He hesitate and remain so silent and distant? Isn't that a sign of not caring?

Why doesn't He or why didn't He come in great power and intervene with a miracle that made it all better? / Isn't that what He would do or should do if He loved us deeply? Doesn't love seek to prevent people from suffering and heal them if they're sick? In fact, wouldn't it keep them from getting sick in the first place?

Isn't that the way we tend to think? And since I believe that is how we tend to reason, should we not see Mary and Martha in this text as representing of all of us? I believe we should. It was their way of asking the question we all ask at one time or another: "Do you really love me God, or love my mother, brother, sister or father, if you're allowing them to suffer like this? Can I really mean as much to you as I thought I did if you're passively standing back and simply watching the whole scenario from a distance?"

As Mary implies: "I thought we were close, yet you didn't rush to get here. I thought we meant something to you, but people we hardly know got here faster than you did. I thought people who cared came quickly or responded swiftly in times of great need."

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Which brings us to the **FOURTH** thing we can learn from this text: What it has to say in relation to those habitually asked questions! And what does it tell us? It tells us in a round about way, in verses 4-15, that He chooses to do what He chooses to do, because He has a higher purpose in mind.

In this passage the purpose for His delaying was that He intended to glorify God and show Himself as Savior. He purposely delayed (sending His friend through the trauma of death and his sisters through the painful experience of grief) in order that the higher purpose of others coming to believe in Him and thus being saved, might be accomplished in the lives of some.

*"It is for God's glory," says Jesus in verse 4, "so that God's Son may be glorified through it." And He repeats it again in verse 14: "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe."*

Jesus dearly loved Lazarus. The only other person other person who was called, *"the one Jesus loved,"* was the Apostle John himself. Yet despite the great love Jesus had for Lazarus and his sisters as well, there was yet a greater driving motivation behind Jesus decision to delay in going to him — the glory of God, the display of His divine nature and others coming to believe and thus be saved because of it.

Yesterday, at Joanne's funeral, I mentioned that she understood that. Because in at least two conversations I had with her in the last year she said: *"I'm not only willing to endure, but want this illness, if through it some of my children or family would be born again or come to know Jesus as their Savior."*

You see, we don't all get to experience miraculous healing — some do and some don't. Yet it has nothing to do with God loving some more and others less! Jesus loved Lazarus and did miraculously raise him from the dead, but the reason he did (as the passage repeats twice) is not because of love, but the higher purpose of God being glorified through it and others coming to salvation because of it.

Which means we must trust (as this passage assures us) that in the mysterious counsels of God (which we am not privy to and probably couldn't understand even if we were)! God has a reason for doing as He does even if He chooses not to reveal that reason to us. Though we yearn to know, and Jesus did tell Mary and Martha, He doesn't always choose to tell us.

As believers we can know that the painful circumstances we endure are **NOT** due to a lack of love on Jesus part. This passage makes that undeniably clear! In fact, the interesting thing is that this is the only place I can think of where Jesus purposely delays in going to heal someone.

Centurion's he doesn't know / widows he's never met before / synagogue leaders who may not even have liked Him but see Him as a last resort / get immediate response form Jesus. He rushes to their aid. But not "the one he loves."

Why is that? Let me offer you a suggestion that the reason He does delay in this particular case, is because the relationship He has with Lazarus and his sisters is so close, He knew they would understand.

With others, no. / An unbeliever may not have understood. / A skeptic may have held a grudge.  
/ A person who wasn't secure in Jesus love may not have been able to understand.

But not Lazarus, Mary and Martha. They knew what John confirms in verse 5: "***Jesus LOVED Martha and her sister and Lazarus.***" And **LISTEN**: When we know people love us we give them the benefit of the doubt. We trust their choices and believe they have good reasons for the decisions they make.

We can often do with those who are assured of our deep love for them, things people not assured of our love could not handle. That, I believe, is why Jesus does with Lazarus, what He never did with anyone else. And I can't help but feel that same principle is true of others — like Art, Carolyn, Ralph, Hugh, Joanne and many more. Those assured of His love can accept that His choices fulfill a higher purpose.

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Then **LAST**, I need to point out from this passage that the knowledge that someone is saved does not negate the emotional response of grief (a I've often heard preached in churches). Paul did not say, "***Do not grieve.***" He said, "***Do not grieve like the pagans do who have no hope.***" We are to grieve, we're simply not to grieve like people who have no hope of the resurrection. The same can be said of Jesus. We do not have a Savior who told others not to cry since Lazarus was saved and going to a better place.

And I say that because I've been in more than one church where the pastor encouraged people to repress public displays of sorrow, and even rejoice when they were in the midst of mourning the loss of one they have loved, because that person was "saved," and thus "going to a better place."

I don't believe that's at all what Scripture would encourage. In a sermon I preached in Honduras, entitled "The Gift of Tears," I pointed out how **Jacob** wept when he thought Joseph had died. / When Jacob died, **Joseph** threw himself on Jacob weeping and kissing his dead body. / When **David** discovers that his best friend Jonathan has been killed, "***he mourned and wept and fasted till evening.***" / **Jeremiah** says that when he saw the destruction of Jerusalem, he cried so much there were no tears left.

Were the people they were crying for saved? Yes they were. But did they weep anyway? Yes they did. Not as the pagans who have no hope, but as Christians who know that grief is an expression of love wounded by the sting of having lost a friend whose companionship and presence and intimate conversation and physical touch they will miss.

I speak from experience, folks. Back on Father's Day Weekend, when I lost my dad, it was a comfort to know he was saved, but that didn't change the fact that I loved him a lot, and would miss hugging and conversing and reminiscing and spending time with him.

Did I rejoice that he was saved? Most certainly. My heart and spirit would have been crushed had he died in an unbelieving, unforgiven and unredeemed state, apart from the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus. But knowing he was saved did not take away the sense of grief one naturally feels at the loss of a friend.

Mary, in our passage for this morning, says of her brother: "***I KNOW he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.***" In other words, "***I KNOW he's saved. I KNOW he's in a better place. I KNOW I'll see him again in heaven. I KNOW all that!***" But she still wept.

Yet be sure of this: ***She wasn't "grieving as one who had no hope."*** She was grieving as one who had great hope and absolute unquestioned assurance that her brother was saved.

That's what I need to stress this morning lest some be confused as to whether they're supposed to rejoice or weep at the loss of a believing loved one. From what we can see Jesus tells us by His example, that there IS a place for grieving loss, even when the person we grieve for is a devout, heaven-bound, one day to be gloriously resurrected believer.

Faith does not make us impervious to the grief of loss! Faith simply helps us to have the hope that we will see the person again, as we grieve. It doesn't lessen the intensity of our grief, it simply helps us keep our bearings while we grieve, by enabling us to see beyond the grave and understand that our tears are simply an expression of the deep and sincere love we have for that person.

In conclusion, then, let me share a note I wrote, at some point in the past, in the side column of my Bible, next to the words Jesus wept: "***The fact that Jesus wept not only gives dignity to our grief, but freedom to our emotions.***"

I don't have to pretend I'm happy when one I love passes away. I can weep and know it's not only ok; its an expression of the love I had for that person — the greater the love, the deeper we are "moved" (as this passage tells us) to tears — even if like Mary, we know the person is saved, will be raised again in the resurrection and is now in a far better place.