

November 7, 2021 – All Saints Sunday

On *that* day, Isaiah prophesied, God will wipe away every tear from every eye.

On *this* day, God will not.

“Lord, if only you had been here,” Mary cried to Jesus, as her brother Lazarus lay in his tomb. He had been there for four awful days, their sister Martha reminds her tardy, overdue Lord.

When Jesus comes, he comes to look death face to face and not to turn away. He comes to be among those deeply troubled and grieved by the impact of death and to share in the depth and breadth of those emotions himself. He comes to weep *with* those who weep as they have weeped. He wipes no tears away ... but sheds his own. Even though, he knows he is about to perform a miracle. Regardless that he knows Lazarus is not going to remain but a moment more in that grave.

When Mary and Martha's message reached the Lord two days earlier, as John describes in this chapter, Jesus appears unfazed. Without knowledge of what was to come, he would seem casually uncaring. Especially without benefit of hindsight, it is easy to be mad at that Jesus. If he has more pressing matters at the house in which he is staying, we aren't told what they could possibly be. Anyone who has been with a loved one dying, especially prematurely, inexplicably and painfully as Lazarus' illness would have been, they can tell us there's no listing or account that would make it acceptable.

We live in the "Lord, if only you had been here!" space right now. Lord, if only you had been here, 5 million people would not have had to die from this coronavirus. Lord, if only you had been here, thousands more could have escaped death from Taliban reprisals and ISIS attacks. Lord, if only you had been here, loneliness and depression would not have taken other thousands to their grave.

But when Jesus is present with the grieving, it is evident that he cares immensely. John is showing us a Jesus who is greatly disturbed in the spirit, telling us this not once but twice. This might just be to drive the point home and make sure we didn't miss it. But when we hear that Jesus is *again* greatly disturbed, I think we should hear how human Jesus, the Son of God was, and is. Death is not the concern of others, it is God's own concern. The very Spirit of God is with Jesus as he weeps with us who weep.

In his care for those who mourn, Jesus does a couple of things that I think are very significant for us who are wanting to follow him even when we are impacted by trauma. He brings us in to the healing work that he is doing. Jesus could have rolled the stone away by himself ... but he asks those who are with him to do it. And when the stone is rolled away and Lazarus emerges still in grave cloth, Jesus commands the crowd to unbind him. To be the hands at work in letting him go.

Jesus also reassures us. I think Martha is downright *offended* at his ask to roll the stone away. The threat is very real, very present from her perspective of merely adding insult to injury. But we have seen how Jesus is affected. If he can be greatly disturbed *again*, he lives and grieves with the same waves as we experience. He feels the uneven trajectory that doesn't just go in one positive direction toward feeling better again. It dulls a bit and later it throbs. It slips away quietly for a moment and it blindsides with no warning. But even in the middle of it, Jesus reminds us, as he reminded Martha, our belief in him has not been in vain.

The gospel narrative leaves this scene and we don't see how Lazarus and his family respond in the wake of their unprecedented reunion. We only know the greater crowd is divided. They all saw the same acts and yet for some, it will be what tips the scale in favor of belief and for others, it will be the straw that breaks the camel's back and pushes them to the plot to kill Jesus before he can make any more trouble.

With that, Jesus continues to face death, now his own. And he faces it without backing down. And in short order, he will prove that even when God is dead, death won't be the end.

For us, this is good news. A holy promise. A deposit down on that realization of the visions of Isaiah and Revelation *that* day is truly coming. When every tear will be wiped away and all will have a place at the table for the feast which God has prepared.

But no, the day Lazarus stepped out of his tomb was not that day. Today is not that day.

Then as now Jesus let the tears fall. His own tears dropping to the same holy ground as those of all who mourn. Jesus sanctions a good cry and doesn't need them to stop until they stop.

Then as now we hear his call to unbind the dead and let them go. And that call finds its way into so many aspects of our lives. It's a call to assist the spiritually dead, the dead in

sin, and be with these children of God looking to new life again. It's a call to release the saints whose lives here with us have ended into the arms of God and God's care and God's rest. It's a call to come alongside the grieving, the afflicted, the hurting and let them know we are here, as God is here with us, and there's nothing we ask of them and nothing God demands. To give the grace of no expectation: no need to be strong, no need to stifle tears, no need to hasten what must take its course.

No need to make this day anything more than what is: the day that God has made, one for letting loose and letting go. Amen.