

## **Our Cup of Tears and Chalice of Love**

*Lenten Series: Our Cup of Life and Vessels We Hold*

Jeremiah 8:22- 9:1, John 11:30 – 35, Luke 19:41-42

April 3, 2022 Fifth Sunday of Lent

Rev. Cynthia Cochran-Carney, First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, CA

*For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.*

*Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?*

*Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?*

*O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears,*

*so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people! Jeremiah 8:22- 9:1*

*Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Come and see." Jesus wept. John 11:30 – 35*

*As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Luke 19:41-42*

Here we are on this fifth Sunday in Lent. Our reading from John shows us Jesus, holding two angry, grief-stricken sisters in his arms. He tells them in this long story about Lazarus that he is the resurrection and the life. Here we are as Jesus holds the truth of eternal and abundant life in unashamed, unapologetic tension with his own tears.

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a hard one for me. At many levels, I don't understand it. I don't understand why Jesus dawdles when he first receives word of Lazarus's illness. I don't understand why he tells his disciples that Lazarus is "asleep" rather than dead. I don't understand why he sidesteps Martha's accusation: "Teacher, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." I don't understand why Jesus raises just one man, leaving countless others in their graves. And I don't understand why Lazarus disappears from John's gospel once his grave clothes fall off. Why is he never heard from again?

In many ways, the story is shrouded in mystery. But today, I cling to the two words in the narrative I do understand: "*Jesus wept.*" For me, this is the heart of the story as we live through the crises – pandemic, war in Ukraine, climate crisis, - where grief takes hold. That

Jesus, embodied Divine Love, stands at the grave of his friend and cries. And then he calls to Lazarus and offers new life.

As we move closer to Easter, I think about resurrection. I believe it as metaphor and as symbol. I believe that God can and will bring back to life all that is dead, buried, forgotten, and festering within us: old wounds, hardened hearts, stubborn addictions, fierce fears. I believe that God is always and everywhere in the business of making us more fully and abundantly alive —alive to love, alive to hope, alive to each other, alive to Creation, alive to connections.

I believe that the great, good news of the Gospel is that there is a mystery – Christ overcame *death* — all death, every death, Death itself. I believe the words of Psalm 30 - *Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning*. I hold these joyful beliefs in a world full of uncertainty and sorrow. Let's explore Jesus' tears.

*When Jesus weeps, he validates 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. Yes, resurrection is around the corner, but in this story, the promise of joy doesn't cancel out the essential work of grief. When Jesus cries, he assures Mary and Martha, that their beloved brother is worth crying for. Through his tears, Jesus calls all of us into the holy vocation of empathy, shared weeping and lament. (1)

*When Jesus weeps, he honors the complexity of our gains and losses, our sorrows and joys.* Raising Lazarus would not bring back the past. It would not cancel out the pain of his final illness, the memory of saying goodbye to a life he loved, or the gaping absence his sisters felt when he died. There is regret, words left unspoken. Joys shaped by the sorrows, fears, and losses they'd just endured.

*When Jesus weeps, he respects the necessity of silence and the unsayable.* We should pay careful attention when Jesus does not speak. A sigh too deep for words. Sometimes there is nothing to be said in the face of loss; sometimes tears are our best and most honorable language. Sometimes we rush to words, feeling an urgent need to wrap other people's pain in platitudes, condolences, promises. Through his wordless tears, Jesus cautions us to pause. He shows us that silence, too, is faithful. Sometimes, silence is love.

*When Jesus weeps, he acknowledges mortality.* In John's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus is a precipitating event that leads to Jesus's own arrest and crucifixion. When word spreads about the miracle in Bethany, the authorities decide that enough is enough; Jesus must be stopped. Jesus's tears are an expression of grief over his own pending death. He knows that the end is imminent. It's okay to cling to this beautiful world. It is okay to mourn the loss of vitality, of intimacy, of longevity. It is okay to love and cherish the gift of life here and now.

What makes you weep? What makes us weep? Personal loss and grief. Shared lament for suffering in the world. Maybe we don't actually shed tears but we feel sorrow and sadness.

A cup of tears.

"Tears are the soul speaking," says Linda Douty, a United Methodist spiritual director. "Always follow the tears." Pay attention, she says, to what makes you cry. Although society encourages us to hide our weeping, we may discover that our tears are one of the most authentic indicators of who we are. And when we cry, we enter a space where we commune with our Creator. God created our body to give us clues as to who we are in our spirit. Too often we go for information instead of transformation. Tears can be a path to healing.

Scripture reminds us that weeping is part of being human. Tears of joy. Tears of being overwhelmed. And tears of sadness and grief for personal and communal.

I think tears can come when we learn difficult truths. And tears may come when we think about how and when to teach children about difficult things. One of the classic decisions parents must make is: when do we share difficult things with our children? Do we fling open the doors and encourage questions early? Or do we shield our children from life's heaviness so that they can "be children" for as long as possible?

When do we talk with our children about adoption (especially if the children are adopted)?

When do we talk with our children about sex and birth control?

When do we talk with our children about our nation's history of slavery and creating different laws for people depending on the color of their skin?

I recently read a piece that included a tweet regarding a 10 year old's comment that "we learned some very sad things in school today" about the real history of Thanksgiving. (3) Does learning about how the pilgrims treated Native Americans make white children hate themselves? I don't think so. Does it make children sad? Probably. And it should. I remember when our younger son Josh was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was driving him home. We were talking about the day. He stopped talking and then he said, "Mom, what was the Holocaust?" They were reading *Number the Stars*. I wanted to cry and did as I talked about the hate and horror.

Every generation carries the baggage of the generations before us whose actions – in the words of the apostle Paul – have fallen short of the glory of God. At any given time, there has been a dominant culture who treated others unfairly. Depending on the generation, those treated unfairly have been Native American or female or African or elderly or disabled or queer or Mexican or Haitian or Jewish or Muslim or rural or children. There are stories of mistreatment and abuse and cruelty and injustice.

When do we teach our children those stories? The truth is that many grown adults don't even know those stories. How many of us are just learning – in adulthood – about the Tulsa Massacre or the Trail of Tears or the World War II Internment Camps or red lining?

I like the idea of teaching difficult stories to children – in loving, thoughtful ways – as sharing sad stories with them. Sometimes life is sad and human beings make mistakes that hurt people. And this is when we also tell children and ourselves that the Holy One is love and loves us and wants us to love each other in the same way.

So let's acknowledge our cup of tears, personal grief and loss and tears and sadness over sad stories. And let's also keep our souls open to delight and joy that is just as real. A theology that says a spiritual life, for us rooted in the Christian household and ways of Jesus, acknowledges the reality of pain and death, and the reality that life is about joy and resurrection and new life and love.

We continue to live into ways to hold the tension between death and life, pain and pleasure. To follow Christ is to embrace joy and to trust that the Holy One will make that joy complete in us. St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Tucson is on the front lines of the border, of immigration challenges, of life and death. Their mission statement is – "Jesus Christ calls us to be a joyful community that celebrates God's love, transforms lives, and is a force for justice in the world."

May we bring our cup of tears to the table and know that we drink from the chalice of love and joy. Amen.

1) Debi Thomas, "Jesus Wept," Journey with Jesus, 3.22.20

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/17-holding/2573-lectionary-essay-for-the-march-29th-2020-rcj-jesus-wept>

2) Crystal Caviness, "Jesus wept. So Should We," umc.org, 8.26.21

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/jesus-wept-so-should-we>

3) Jan Edmiston, "We Learned Some Very Sad Things At School Today," 11.17.21

<https://achurchforstarvingartists.blog/2021/11/17/we-learned-some-very-sad-things-at-school-today/>