

Lent 5A

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March 29, 2020

*Jesus Weeps with You*

“Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.”

Heartbroken, confused and in utter desperation Martha runs from her home to confront Jesus. Now, Lazarus was not some stranger. He was Jesus’s good friend. His home was a place of safety and fellowship for Jesus, where he been a recipient of Martha’s hospitality and Mary’s devotion. Time and again Jesus went out of his way to stop what he was doing in order to respond to the suffering of the people around him. So, Martha and Mary sent word. But Jesus did not come. And now, it was too late. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

Martha’s reaction is what makes the most sense to me in this story. It is reasonable that she wants to understand what’s happening. In this out of control, scary world in which she finds herself, she wants to manage the situation and bring order amid the chaos. If she can somehow make sense of it all, then maybe she will feel a little less out of control, a little less afraid, and a little less heartbroken.

It is tempting for us to move quickly to the end of the story - emphasizing the miracle. To realize that there was a plan all along. In our hesitation to linger in that place of Martha’s anguish and discomfort we overlook one of the most amazing moments in all of the Gospels. Overcome with grief, Jesus wept. Jesus wept for his friend lying in the tomb. Jesus wept for Mary and Martha and all who were heartbroken. Jesus wept for the world and the enormity of its suffering; and he may have even wept for himself journeying ever closer to the cross. Before Jesus commanded his friend to come out of the tomb, he broke down and cried. One writer says that Jesus’ tears sanctified ours. In his weeping, he honored our human need to weep.

A grace I am receiving in this strange and discomfoting time is the opportunity to be fed through the words of my fellow clergy. On Thursday I listened to a reflection of a friend

who was sitting on her porch with the birds singing their mornings songs in the background. She spoke with a tender vulnerability about the grief she was experiencing. As her voice cracked and tears welled up in her eyes, my heart broke open. In that moment I realized that over the past two weeks I had been working so hard (as a Martha always does) to ensure the continued care and connection among all of you my beloved people. And in the midst of this good and holy work, I had not stopped to grieve.

To weep over not being able to see your faces around our holy communion circle or to experience our five-minute raucous exchange of the Peace. To weep over not being able to laugh with your children or visit you in your homes. To weep because I feel so far away from my family and I worry about them. To weep for those alone and isolated in this time; and for those with disabilities and chronic illnesses who have been made more marginalized by this pandemic. My friend gave me a precious gift this week. The permission to shed my own tears. And to know I am not alone in doing so.

The inspiration for my friend's reflection came from Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun and spiritual writer. She created a devotional for this season of Lent entitled, [A Time to Weep](#). Apropos for this wilderness of quarantines and social distancing in which we find ourselves. She writes, "Few of us see our weeping as a spiritual gift or a matter of divine design. But we are wrong. Weeping is very holy and life giving. It sounds alarms for a society and wizens the soul of the individual. If we do not weep on the personal level, we shall never understand humanity around us. If we do not weep on the public level, we are less than human ourselves. Anger, disillusionment, tears explode in the midst of humanity to give us all a chance to become more human than we ever could have without them. If we do not allow ourselves to face and feel pain, we run the risk of entombing ourselves in a plastic bubble where our lies about life shrink our hearts and limit our vision. It is not healthy to insist that our deep hurts and cutting disappointments and appalling losses and great personal mistakes do not exist. On the contrary. To weep tears of frustration about them may be to take our first real steps toward honesty, toward mental health, toward a life that is worth living. Weeping, in fact, may be the best indicator we have of what life is really all about for us. It may be only when we weep that we can come to know best either ourselves or our worlds."

Entering into Martha's pain and suffering, Jesus wept. And then he raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus wept. And then he began his journey to the cross. Jesus wept. And then he was led out of his own empty tomb. Creating life in the midst of grief, love in the midst of loss, hope in the midst of despair. God comes to us and shares the fullness of our human emotions and experience. Weeping is holy and life giving, Jesus shows us. So, shed tears of sadness and frustration, and tears of joy. Knowing that your cries do not go unheard. For Jesus weeps with you.

Let us pray.

God of honest emotions

God of cathartic tears,

it would be sadder if in these days

we didn't need a good cry,

a release from the body,

a moment to name how it feels.

We thank you that these tears

are not tears of weakness

but of witness.

They speak to a God

who wept as we do, and showed

human love is divine. *Amen.*

*Today's prayer comes from the Corrymeela Peace Community in Northern Ireland: 27 March, 2020.*