

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Year B; All Saints Day observed

Isaiah 25: 6-9

Psalm 24

John 11: 32-44

**John 11:32-44**

*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, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

***In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

**This All Saints' Day feels especially tender for Tim and me; several folks we love deeply died this year. I keep being startled to remember that they have died; the world does not seem right without them, a bit askew on its axis.**

**I find myself seeing something in a shop and thinking, that would be perfect for.....and then realizing, again, that she has died.**

My uncle, an old neighbor, a dear friend, none of these folks were daily in Tim's and my lives, but they were strong beams of support and we miss them and grieve.

In our gospel reading from John, the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, we see Jesus grieving, and we see the godly and human Jesus, almost in the same breath.

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, are dear friends to Jesus, unusual roles in the life of Jesus, not disciples, not family, these three were simply friends to Jesus. And you know the story: Lazarus became ill and died, and Jesus does not arrive in time to help and heal.

We pick up the story today as Jesus arrives four days after Lazarus has died and been buried, and grief is fresh and present and terribly tender.

Both sisters have spoken to Jesus with anguish and anger, that if he had arrived earlier, Lazarus would still be alive, expressing all the 'what ifs' we do after a death, all the what ifs that we lash out at each other with, and ourselves, when tears are too dangerous, but yelling seems acceptable.

And Jesus present now, fully human and fully of-God all at once, both knowing he can raise Lazarus from the dead, AND that he too is heartbroken to stand at the tomb of his dear friend.

And Jesus, at perhaps his most human, responds, and the text tells us: "Jesus began to weep."

Readers of Forward Day by Day may have noticed in the All Saints' meditation, that the author offers another translation of this phrase, from the Peshitta or the Biblical translation used by the Syrian Christian Churches:

"And the tears of Jesus came."

I like this translation, as I can feel it more deeply in my bones, and in my eyes, as tears do come as we grieve, pouring out before we can stop them,

often startling us.

And the humanness of Jesus felt those tears arrive, perhaps surprising him too.

Our gospel reading too reminds us that the people who want to tell us what to feel or not feel as we grieve, are as old as time.

After Jesus begins to weep, folks immediately start to interpret his tears:

*“See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”*

Grief often makes people uncomfortable, for all sorts of reasons. But their discomfort can lead to what I call Band-Aid statements, something quick to slap on the wound of grief, more to cover it up than to offer healing.

The Band-Aid for Jesus offers analysis of his tears; why is HE crying? Hey if he could restore the sight of that blind guy, he could certainly have stopped this death!

Modern versions of the Band-Aids abound, and you have likely heard others too:

“God needed an angel, so He took your child, sibling, best friend, spouse.”

“This death was for the best.”

“God works in mysterious ways.”

“Are you still sad? Come on, let’s cheer you up!”

Instead of telling grieving folks what to feel or not feel, we all need room in grief to experience the sadness.

Recently I was listening to a podcast from Public Radio called “On Being” hosted by Krista Tippett. This podcast is described as:

*“Pursuing deep thinking and moral imagination, social courage and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together.”*

One of the guests that week was Pádraig O Tuama, an Irish poet and writer, who previously, was community leader of Corrymeela, Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organization.

Pádraig Ó Tuama spoke of growing up Catholic and of the Stations of the Cross.

O Tuama spoke of doing the Stations of the Cross daily for many years growing up, and what he learned from them spoke to me of grief on this All Saints' Day:

*"In Catholic and Episcopal churches, you'll find 14 images, from the time that Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to death to the time that his corpse was laid in the tomb. And they're just 14 stopping points. And for 10 years, I did the stations every day. And what I like about the Stations of the Cross is that they don't say, "Oh, but then there's the fifteenth one, where it's all lovely, fantastic."*

*In the traditional understanding, there isn't a fifteenth station. The idea is to find hope in the practice of what seemed to be the worst. And it is the worst. There's no pretense that (Jesus's arrest and) abduction and torture and murder are anything other than abduction, torture, and murder. However, there is the understanding that, within it, we can discover some kind of hope — the hope of protest, the hope of truth-telling, the hope of generosity, the hope of gesture — even in those places." (On Being podcast, October 28, 2021)*

Finding hope within our grief, rather than just putting Band-Aids on it, or closing it off in a dark closet, allowing room for our grief to sit awhile at the 14<sup>th</sup> Station, and not rush to the 15<sup>th</sup> and resurrection, is crucial.

Resurrection is patient and there for us, when we are ready.

But the world wants us to rush to the 15<sup>th</sup> Station, so our grief will not be so disquieting to them, but we need time to grieve, time to sit at the foot of the cross, at the tomb, time to, like Jesus did, let the tears come.

Amen.

