

“JESUS WEPT”  
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Elkton United Methodist Church  
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All Saints’ Sunday

Rev. 21:1-7

John 11:32-44

Mary was mad. At the start of the gospel lesson, Mary is angry that Jesus did not get to her home in time to save her brother’s life, and when he finally does get there, she kneels down before him and tells him so. “Lord, if you have been here, my brother would not have died.”

Her words moved Jesus – her words and all of the people there weeping moved Jesus. And then when they showed him where they had laid Lazarus after he died, Jesus wept as well. For Lazarus had been a good, good friend to him – a man on whom he could rely, a man whose home was like a second home to Jesus. Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha were very dear to him, and Lazarus’ death touched him deeply.

Perhaps there’s not a better picture of what grief looks like than this passage of scripture. Because grief is not just sadness, there’s so much more to it, so many more emotions that come with it.

Sometimes there is anger, like Mary’s. “Why did this have to happen? How did it happen? Why did my loved one get this dreaded disease? He or she was a good person. Why? Why?”

And sometimes, yes, there’s blame. In order to make sense of death, we want to hold somebody responsible. The other driver, a medical person who missed a diagnosis, the person themselves. Sometimes, to be able to wrap our arms around the death of someone we love, we want to blame someone or something else.

For sure, grief, for many people, means weeping – lots and lots of weeping. Life has changed forever, the one you love is gone physically so that face to face contact is no more. Your mind goes in a thousand different directions – “How will I go on? What will I do without him or her?” And all you can do is cry.

And then, there’s a sort of numbness – walking around in a fog, not really able to move forward, not really able to comprehend things going on around you, not really feeling much, because well, it’s kind of your body’s way of protecting itself. A dull ache and emptiness sets in for a while.

Oh, the pictures of grief are many-colored. Here, in this story, Jesus feels grief just as surely as any of us do – deep in his heart and soul. And he’s surrounded with people like us – who mourn the loss of their brother and their friend.

It is a sad story, as is the passing of all of the people in our lives who have died in the past year. Just in our church family alone, we lost eleven dear members.

We wept over the loss of some really special people – a balcony buddy, an usher, members of the United Methodist Women and the old United Methodist Men, a number of extraordinary mothers and fathers, a farmer with a wicked sense of humor – they were all special in their own way, and made our church a little more special just by being a part of us. We wept when they died.

And we wept over others as well. Some are those whose names are listed on a bulletin insert this morning – dear ones related to people in the church. And there was a multitude more – people whose names are in our hearts this very moment – people in our lives near and far away whose lives touched ours and whose deaths brought tears.

So this year brought its share of grief to many of us. Many tears were shed, sometimes anger and blame came as well, and, for a season, many walked through the numbness and loneliness of grief. Just like Mary, just like Jesus.

And friends, if death was the end of the story, if weeping and anger and blame and numbness and loneliness were the end of the story, it would be tragic. But the Good News of the Gospel is that they are not, because, in Christ, death never has the final word. The story goes on, and the story is resurrection!

Because Jesus rose from death, because He lives, so too do all of our dear ones. Just as Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, so too does he welcome those who have died to new life in heaven, for all the days to come.

So that adds a new chapter to the journey of grief. And it is, perhaps surprisingly, joy! Even while we weep, still we rejoice, because we know that our loved one’s journey has not ended, only begun in a new way, and in a new place. And in that place, whatever struggles they faced in this life, whatever illness took them away, is gone. They are free and whole and back in the arms of the God who created them. For them, indeed, all is well.

And so, with tears streaming down our faces, yet we can rejoice, because the ones we loved have, as one obituary this week said, “touched the hand of Jesus.”

So today, with all the emotions of grief – tears, anger, blame, numbness, loneliness, and yes, joy – we remember the ones we have loved who have left us this year. In a moment we’ll see a moving video about the members of our church who died, and then, as we sing the wonderful “Hymn of Promise,” we’ll remember them

and others as you're invited to bring your flowers of remembrance up to the vases here at the front of the church.

And as you do, please know that the One who carried your loved one to new life in heaven, is also the One who carries you through the journey of grief, and for you too, all will yet be well.

So now, let us remember the saints.

VIDEO