

Rev. Scott Marrese-Wheeler
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John 11:1-45
"Jesus wept."

The first time I saw my father cry was when he received the news that his college roommate and friend, Gene Moore, had died.

19 years ago, I received the news that my dad died. I cried. Three weeks later, I sat with Staci, her dad, and sisters at the bedside of her mother, holding her hands, we watched her take her last breath. We cried.

I know some of you have been in similar situations, shedding tears at the death of a loved one or friend.

This past Wednesday, as I shared in the imposition of ashes, making the sign of the cross on people's foreheads, speaking the words that remind us of our mortality: **"Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return,"** people cried.

Author José N. Harris **"Tears shed for another person are not a sign of weakness. They are a sign of a pure heart."** (MI VIDA: A Story of Faith, Hope and Love)

Charles Dickens says, **"We should never be ashamed of our tears."** (Great Expectations)

Fredrick Buechner, says: **"Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go to next."** (Whistling in the Dark)

As for tears and gender, our society has long believed that it is okay for women to cry, but not for men. We have taught our sons that "Big boys don't cry". Maybe you were taught that as a child or said it to your own child?

Yet, here is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the World - crying.

The shortest verse in all of scripture is made up of two words - "Jesus wept." It is a powerful image. Some scholars suggest these two words sum up the whole of the Gospel.

Wednesday afternoon, I headed home with a heart full of joy from one of the most meaningful Ash Wednesday experiences I have had in ministry. And then I heard the news, 17 high school students were shot and killed, 14 more wounded. And I cried.

I cried even more when I heard from a young mother, Kathy Eyler who was a part of my youth group in Indianapolis. She is the mother of three young children, one who shares a birthday with Sam. She lives in the Parkland, Florida area. Her children will attend the high school where the killings took place. My tears mingled with hers, as they did with the parents, students, staff, law enforcement officers, EMTs, and news reporters wept. Did you?

The Prophet Jeremiah (31:15), as quoted in Matthew 2 about Herod's slaughter of innocent children, cries out: **"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."**

The picture that haunts me from this latest mass shooting is of a mother, holding her child, they are both wailing, tears flowing down their cheeks, on the mother's forehead, ashes forming the sign of the cross.

And Jesus wept.

Since the beginning of 2018 we have had 8 school shootings that have resulted in students being killed or wounded.

And Jesus wept.

Back in December, we remember the 20 First and Second Graders and their six teachers who were shot and killed. And Jesus wept.

Las Vegas, Orlando, San Bernardino, Charleston, Columbine, Sutherland Springs, in every community, in many homes, all around the country, every day over and over again.

And Jesus wept.

Every time there is a mass shooting that kills people, the National Rifle Association membership increases and profits rise for those manufacturing guns. I wonder if Jesus weeps at this fact?

I wonder if Jesus doesn't also weep at our inability to finally take action to stop the senseless gun violence and the worship of our instruments of death?

Jesus wept.

While John shows us the powerful image of Jesus weeping when he hears the news of his friend, Lazarus' death, the writer of Luke's Gospel, gives us another powerful image of Jesus weeping. This time he does so over a whole people who just don't seem to understand.

Luke (19-41-44) says: **"And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!'"**

Christ's tears are not limited to our nation's insane obsession with guns and killings. Jesus tears are not over our global wars that kill thousand's upon thousands of men, women and children while destroying homes, villages and communities because of our thirst for power, oil, money, and superiority over others.

Jesus also weeps in hospital and hospice rooms, in doctors offices and in business offices, in classrooms and in the teachers lounge, in soup kitchens and at food pantries, in the halls of power and in the hallways of schools, in coffee shops and bars, in our sanctuary this morning and out on the streets, in the middle of the night and under the bright noon day sun.

Jesus weeps with us at the news of death which we all face daily.

Lazarus death was all too real to him. Jesus knew he too faced death. God knows, Jesus was human just like you and me. His tears were real, just like your tears are real in the midst of death and despair, anguish and grief, suffering and sorrow.

Professor Angela Dienhart Hancock says: **“Christianity is not for Pollyannas who think the answer to every problem is to put on a happy face and think about all the good times coming up in heaven. Christianity is for people who know the hard truth about death....”** (Good Preacher - Pittsburgh Theological Seminary)

And we do know the hard truth about death, don't we?

During a time when many of us might question our faith, screaming out in anger at God, saying to Jesus' as Mary did: **“If you had only been here, our loved one would not have died,” “Those 17 students and teachers would still be alive!” “This tragedy would not have happened!”** And then like so many people, our tears begin to flow.

And when they do, Jesus doesn't try to stop them. He doesn't say, **“Stop crying you big baby”**. He doesn't say: **“Suck it and act like a man”**.

What Jesus does is act like God. He does the most powerful thing any human who knows the fullness of God's abiding love and presence can do - He cries. He is not ashamed of his tears. They are not a sign of weakness. They are holy tears, healing tears, and tears that we need to pay attention to. For our tears are mixed the holy tears of God.

And it is only in sharing them with Martha and Mary at the news of death, that Jesus speaks of life.

The one who is the Resurrection and the Life - wept with us, for us, and because of us.

Jesus wept openly tears of grief. He then cried - **“Lazarus come out!”** It was a call and a response. From the death like grip of the grave, Lazarus heard the voice of Jesus, calling him to life, and he came out.

Jesus is weeping tears of pain and sorrow as we as a people lay dead in the tomb of our own making.

Jesus is calling still calling to us to come out and live again!

If we have the courage to listen, to unbind ourselves from the grip of things that kill us (spiritually, emotionally and physically), and risk coming out and living, we will discover that our tears are transformed from grief to joy!

May we as God's own beloved, follow our tears, letting them anoint our lives, signaling our response to God's call to join in life giving acts of healing and hope, which unbind us from our obsessions, fears, and quest for power and control. May our tears, mingled with Jesus, shows us the path that leads us out of death and into Life anew!

Jesus wept.