

The Church of the Good Shepherd
The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza
November 4, 2018
All Saints Sunday; John 11:32-44

Sometimes, the most powerful statements are made with the fewest words. “I’m sorry.” “You’re welcome.” “I forgive you.” “I love you.” It is often said that the shortest sentence in all our Holy Scriptures is “Jesus wept.” Two words – the very simplest of sentences. Subject – verb. Of course, our translation of the gospel story from John containing this sentence is not quite so concise. What we heard this morning was, “Jesus began to weep.” Two additional words, yet the spare clarity of this remarkable action is still communicated.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus seem to be the closest thing Jesus has to best friends. Their home in Bethany was often a home-away-from-home for Jesus and his followers. With them, Jesus seemed most relaxed, most human. And the love they have for each other is evident in how intimately and freely they interact with each other. When Jesus arrives at Bethany upon hearing the news of Lazarus’ death, both Martha and Mary speak with Jesus as only those who are intimate do: expressing their frustration and anger for his coming too late to heal their brother, all the more disappointed because they knew that he could have healed Lazarus. On Jesus’ part, he received their grief and anger, even while weeping himself as he suffered the pain of his friend’s death and the sorrow experienced by those he loved most.

At the tomb where Lazarus has been laid, Jesus tells the crowd to roll away the stone covering the entrance to the tomb. He offers a prayer expressing his relationship to the Father so that those present would know that Jesus was sent by God. Jesus then calls out: “Lazarus, come out!” and the man who has been dead for four days comes out from within the darkness. In a sign of God’s glory as manifested through his Son, death is overcome. Resurrected life may still be to come, but renewed, restored, and enlivened life may be lived now.

That the Son of God shed tears, just like us, demonstrates something important – that our sorrows and our very lives, loves, and relationships are precious in God’s eyes. Jesus not only values the tears shed by those closest to him but also responds to them with tears of his own. Jesus sheds these tears in spite of the fact that he will soon raise Lazarus from the dead, offering a foretaste of the time spoken of in Revelation when all things will be made new and every tear will be wiped away.

I think it is important to note here that Jesus doesn’t merely wield his power in order to offer yet another sign pointing to his divine identity. Rather, he acts in response to real human suffering and actual human tears. Twice in this passage we read that Jesus is “greatly disturbed” and “deeply moved.” As one theologian imagined, Jesus’ own tears must have been still wet on his cheeks when he “cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

I’ve been thinking about Jesus’ tears this past week with all the terrible news from around our country and around our world. I am comforted that my God understands my human condition and that all of our humanity – the good and the evil – is being redeemed in Christ, the Word of God who took on human flesh and walked and lived among us.

Many tears have been shed recently – tears for those injured and killed in hate crimes, such as in Kentucky and Pittsburgh last week; tears for children who have been separated from their parents; tears for all those who suffer from our epidemic of violence; tears for refugees who are forced to leave all that they have ever known; tears for all the downtrodden and marginalized

who suffer from our collective lack of love. Some days I feel overwhelmed with grief and I fear that if I allow myself to weep, I may never stop.

Thanks be to God that our sorrow and tears are not lost on God. That, in the midst of our suffering, God is present with us and joins us in our grief – that our tears of suffering cause God to be “greatly disturbed” and “deeply moved.” Our tears move not only our hearts but also call God to action to restore that which has been lost, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to usher in a new creation in which every tear shall be wiped away. We, too, are called to be more than onlookers in this drama. We are called to allow the tears of others to disturb our hearts and move us to action as well. We are called to liberate ourselves from the bondage of fear.

Friday morning, I listened to a news piece on NPR in which a Native American woman from Michigan was interviewed. Anne Humphry spoke of her experience with being marginalized and ignored because of racism. While she said she has experienced this since she was a child, it is getting worse – moving from being ignored to being confronted and verbally assaulted. Annie then spoke a great truth so simply and clearly. She said, the secret to freedom was just having no fear. “Can you imagine that?” She said. “No matter what’s happening around you, if you’re not afraid, then you have freedom.”¹

We, too, can live without fear. As members of the Body of Christ through our baptism, we have died to the old life of fear and have been reborn to the new life of love. In Christ, we can live fully into our holy identities as God’s beloved, friends, neighbors, and people of resurrection. We can proclaim that God’s love is stronger than our fear; stronger than death. We live among the great communion of saints who affirm this truth and remind us who we are and to whom we belong. In Christ, we are called to remove our self-imposed shackles of fear that keep us in bondage and to “come out!”

As people of resurrection, we are no longer fearful individuals but are bound together into a stronger, larger whole. And our sense of who we are – the “us” of the us-and-them dichotomy – is always increasing, always growing. As we learn to put on the mind of Christ and to see Christ within each person, we recognize that we are an even greater “us” than we ever imagined.

A wise and eloquent priest I know wrote that “every one of us is a universe of hurt and hope, and beauty and burden, at once subject to this world and, yet, so full of God.” Every one of us. That means you and me. That means the folks driving along Braddock Road. That means all of us. But to clarify even more, let me say that the “us” of that claim includes our political opponents; the “us” includes those who died in Jeffersontown, Kentucky’s Kroger; the “us” includes those who died in Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue. In fact, the “us” includes everyone – there is no not-us.

In the Body of Christ and as people of resurrection, we must recognize that there is no longer a “them”. This the radical missional claim that all are One in Christ. When Jesus spread his arms wide upon the cross, his embrace encompassed everyone. As our retiring bishop Shannon Johnston reminded us at our Diocesan Convention last week, “All are welcome in our Church. And ‘all’ means ‘all’.” All are welcome in our Church. All are welcome into the embrace of God. This radical commandment to love means that there is no room for fear – no room for hate.

I am not an overtly political person. I’ve never been one to explicitly carry my beliefs before me as a banner. My cars have no bumper stickers. I wear no t-shirts with slogans and I’ve never worn a political button. And I’ve never had a sign in my front yard. Not until recently. In front of our house, we have been proudly displaying a yard sign for the past few months. It is a

simple blue sign that says, “Hate has no home here.” These words are then translated in a number of languages.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, I do not believe that hate is the opposite of love. I believe that fear is the opposite of love. Fear is love that has been malformed and corrupted. Hate is a particular manifestation of fear in the world – it is our internal fear projected outward onto a target. There are other ways of manifesting fear, but hate is the most destructive. Hate gives us license to perceive another as less-than-human, as undeserving of love and respect. And by doing so, we are given a brief respite from the bondage of fear. But, ultimately, hate is an equal-opportunity destroyer as it is damaging and de-humanizing not only to the target but also the source.

As the beloved children of God and as each other’s friends and neighbors, let us be present to the suffering of others and bear each other’s humanity. Let us follow the model of Jesus who showed us how to be fully human. Let us weep with those who suffer, comfort those who grieve, love and encourage those who are anxious, and allow the love of God to heal our hearts and renew our spirits. As people of resurrection, we make no home for fear or hate – only God’s life-affirming love.

Today, let us boldly declare our promise that hate has no home here...

Hate has no home in The Church of the Good Shepherd.

Hate has no home in The Episcopal Church.

Hate has no home in the Body of Christ.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/02/663339414/feeling-heard-in-minnesotas-8th-congressional-district>