



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA
Rev. Scott E. Schul
All Saints Sunday (11/4/2018)
Sermon Title: "Jesus Weeps"
Gospel Text: John 11:32-44

Jesus began to weep. It's one of the shortest verses in the Bible. But those few, sparse words carry a wallop of a punch, *especially* today.

We certainly have our reasons to weep. We start with these fifteen candles. On All Saints Sunday we remember the faithful *throughout the ages* who have died but who remain connected to us through Christ's Church. But we *especially* remember those saints of Grace who have died since we gathered together one year ago for All Saints Day 2017. Each one is represented by a candle. But these candles are more than symbols. They are more than names. They remind us *of* and draw us *toward* fifteen people – people we knew and loved – people who walked among us – people whose voices we can still hear in our minds. Those fifteen people experienced the full range of human existence. As children they learned to speak and to walk. They developed skills. They sang songs. They learned a trade. They fell in love. They experienced joyful days, and days of hardship and bitter sadness. They have mattered to us because they were our parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends.

But they have also mattered to Jesus because they are part of his holy creation. He loved and continues to love each and every one of the people represented by those candles. And so Jesus weeps with us, here today. It's probably an unfamiliar thing for most of us to picture Jesus weeping. We might imagine him smiling with children as he calls them closer, or teaching as he sits on the side of a gentle, grass covered mountain, or riding in a wooden boat on the Sea of Galilee. We might even be able to picture him in agony on the cross. But today, our Gospel invites us to see Jesus weeping.

It may seem odd to us that Jesus would be weeping. After all, he's the Son of God. He "was in the beginning with God," and "all things came into being through him." He is the Alpha and the Omega and knows the beginning and the end. If anyone knows how each of our stories ends – if anyone knows God's plan – it is Jesus. Jesus knew that he had the power and the intention to raise Lazarus from the dead. And Jesus knew that even though Lazarus would eventually die again, there would be another *final* and glorious resurrection in Lazarus's future. All would be well because of the victory over sin and death that Jesus himself would win.

And yet Jesus began to weep. It all started when Lazarus's sister Martha confronted Jesus upon his arrival. Before he could even speak, words began spilling from her mouth – words of grief and pain. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" Who among us, in the midst of grief, has not likewise confronted Jesus? In reply, Jesus offered her a simple promise of hope: "Your brother will rise again."

Martha's sister, Mary, was grieving too. She repeated the same agonizing words Martha had blurted out. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!" As they

prepared to go to the tomb where Lazarus had laid for four days, Jesus could bear no more. He began to weep. But why? Why did Jesus weep?

Jesus wept because he loved Lazarus. He wept for the pain that Mary and Martha were feeling. He wept for the loss the entire community had experienced when Lazarus had died. Maybe Jesus wept because he knew he himself would soon face a cross and his own tomb. And maybe Jesus wept because he knew that *all* of these things had to unfold just this way, in God's time, even if that way passed through a river of tears.

And so today, Jesus weeps with us. He weeps for the pain and grief we feel from the loss of these fifteen dear people. He also weeps for the pain and grief we feel from the losses of loved ones that occurred years before. Perhaps on most days the pain of those losses has receded. But on other days, memories are kindled by the aroma of a favorite perfume she used to wear, a phrase he used to say, or a meal they always enjoyed, making that pain agonizingly fresh. Jesus weeps for you today as well.

Of course the losses we mourn extend beyond this altar and beyond the Grace family. The news relentlessly reminds us that death – tragic, heart wrenching death - surrounds us. It hurts even when it happens in places where violence predictably resides, like far flung battlefields around the world as brave military personnel defend the causes of freedom and liberty, or in the midst of crime and disorder as police and other first responders rush into harm's way to protect us. Jesus weeps for them. Our pain is especially sharp when we encounter death in places where it should never, ever occur, like when our children are stalked like animals in schools, when people are murdered in grocery stores because of the color of their skin, and when faithful worshippers gather in a sacred house of worship and are mercilessly mowed down because of their faith. Jesus weeps bitter tears for those losses.

I am weary of death. I'm sure you are too. I wish I could offer you an explanation or rationale for these deaths in our Grace family and the countless tragic deaths around our world that break our hearts and shake us to the core. Like Martha and Mary, we want to rise up, confront Jesus, and say, "Lord, if you had been here, these people would not have died!"

But our faith assures us that God is present amidst all this death. And we know that death is a part of life. Jesus died. Even Lazarus, who was so miraculously raised from his tomb, would die again. But Jesus assures us, as he assured his friends Martha and Mary, that one day our loved ones will rise again. And someday, hopefully far in the future, when a candle stands sentinel for us on this altar or one like it, we too will have claimed that remarkable promise of new life.

When Jesus reached the tomb of Lazarus, he prayed that everyone there might be renewed in their belief, their faith, and their hope. And then in a loud voice he cried, "Lazarus, come out!" As the life began to flow again through Lazarus's veins, and as he emerged into the light from that dark tomb, wrapped in burial cloths, Jesus commanded the people to "unbind him, and let him go." Likewise, Jesus has called all of us to come out of our dark tombs of grief and pain. He has called us out of our caves of isolation, frustration, worry, and fear. He has called

us *here* so he can pray with us. He has called us *here* so he can renew our belief, our faith, and our hope. He has called us *here* so that we can be unbound.

Friends, peace be with you. Do not be afraid. In Jesus Christ, be *unbound* from the grief that follows you like a shadow. In Jesus Christ, be *unbound* from the fears that accumulate from the tragedies which fill our news. Jesus Christ has claimed you in baptism. You are loved. You are saved. And you are blessed. Be *unbound* so that you can love boldly, give generously, and serve abundantly. One day, as Isaiah prophesied, death will be swallowed up forever, and the LORD God will wipe away the tears from all faces. And as John the Revelator promised, God will be with us, and mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

But until that day comes, we will gather together as a family so that we remain strong. We will gather together with our Savior so that we remain hopeful. And yes, as we gather, sometimes we will weep. But rest assured; Jesus understands. That's why he weeps with us. Amen.