

Today on this all Saints' Sunday, we remember those who have served God on earth and now enjoy His company in Heaven. This is not a day of sorrow, but a day of gladness, for we know that because Christ lives, we, too, shall live with the company of all those who are part of the family of Christ. We remember the words of St. Paul when he instructed the church at Thessalonica with these words, ***“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Notice that St. Paul is not telling these believers that Christians do not grieve. Rather he is telling them not to “grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.”

Philip Yancey in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, tells us that there are Christians from a certain part of Africa who never say of their dead that they have “lost” that person like we may say, “I lost my wife last spring.” **That’s seeing death from our perspective. But these African folks view death from God’s perspective. Instead, they announce with joy that their loved ones “have arrived” in Heaven. They’re not lost at all.** They know exactly where they are. They are in Heaven with God. ***“Do not grieve like [those] who have no hope.”***

Woody Allen, who has made a successful career out of the fear of death, was once asked if he hoped to live forever on the silver screen. Allen answered that ***“I’d rather live on in my apartment.”*** He went on to add that ***“I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it by not dying.”*** Well, good luck with that, Woody.

Today we are going to visit with three of Jesus’ closest friends, Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus spent time in their home. He would stop to visit with Mary, Martha and Lazarus whenever he passed through their community. They had shared many enjoyable evenings together.

Jesus was teaching one day a couple of miles from Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus resided when word came to him that Lazarus was sick and would probably die: ***“Lord, he whom you love is ill,”*** they said to him. Certainly, Jesus would come at once to the aid of his sick friend. Jesus was Lazarus’ last hope. Jesus had healed other people from their illnesses. Surely, he would want to heal his friend. But, as you know, that’s not exactly the way things worked out.

Instead of going at once to Lazarus, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. What doesn’t make sense is that Jesus was only two miles away from Mary and Martha’s home. He could have made the trip in less than an hour. **Instead he purposely stayed where he was for two more days.**

How would you feel if you or a loved one went to the emergency room of the hospital and had to wait forty-eight hours for the doctor to show up and treat you? You would be outraged. If a loved one died while waiting two days for the doctor we would be more than outraged, we would probably want to sue the hospital.

We are given a clue, though, that SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY IS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE. We read that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was ill he said, ***“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”*** **What did he mean by that?** He meant something magnificent, as we know. By the time Jesus finally made his way to the home of Martha and Mary, their brother was already dead.

When Martha heard that Jesus was approaching, she went running out to meet him. **Her first words to Jesus were, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”** That’s quite a statement of faith for Martha to make. **Jesus assured her, “Your brother will rise again.”** Martha agreed with Jesus—thinking Jesus meant Lazarus would rise on the last day. Jesus replied, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Jesus asked Martha if she believed what he told her. Martha replied, “Yes, Lord.”

However, Martha went back home, apparently not expecting anything to come from her conversation with Jesus. Martha told her sister, Mary, that “the Teacher is here and is calling for you.”

Mary got up at once and ran out of the house to meet Jesus. Mary found Jesus at the same place her sister had left him. She knelt at his feet and repeated what her sister had said, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Mary was grieving uncontrollably over her brother’s death. The people who followed her out to meet Jesus also began weeping and wailing.

Here we have one of the most beautiful scenes in all the Scriptures. John tells us that “*when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’*” he asked.

“*‘Come and see, Lord,’*” they replied. And John writes, “*Jesus wept.*”

“Then the Jews said, ‘*See how he loved him!*’”

We all know that “*Jesus wept*” is the shortest verse in the Bible. **Do we understand that this is also one of the most powerful verses in the Bible?**

Tom Wright in his Bible Study Guide, *John for Everyman*, asks the question, “*Why does John show us a weeping Jesus?*” It’s a good question. However, I believe most people are greatly impressed by a weeping Jesus. We may have snickered as children when we were asked to cite a Bible verse and we chose “Jesus wept,” simply and solely because it was the shortest verse in the Bible. But as we’ve aged, **I believe most of us have learned to prize that little verse.**

WHY? It shows us the HUMAN SIDE OF JESUS. Weeping showed Jesus’ human side so that those of us who have hurt so badly at some time in our lives so that our tears also flowed could identify with him. Anybody who has ever been hurt knows what it is to cry, unless we are one of those sad people who have learned to smother any show of emotion. That is a very unhealthy practice.

Joanne Wallace, in her book *The Image of Loveliness* tells about a lady in a class she was teaching who had been married for thirty years. As a child she had been taught that “*big girls don’t cry.*” Subsequently, she had never shed a single tear. This had turned her into a woman who came across to others as a visibly harsh person. According to Joanne Wallace, it had destroyed her inner beauty. “She scarcely ever talked to anyone, and consequently she had few friends,” says Wallace. When Wallace pointed out in class that crying is not a weakness, this woman began at certain times to let her tears flow. Wallace notes that she “is now developing a genuine softness that is much more appealing than was her stoic reserve.”

That’s important. Tears are a natural, healthy response to deep hurt. Of course, people weep for different reasons. In the period following the fall of apartheid in South Africa, the first President of the new South Africa, Nelson Mandela, **appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.** The commission’s task was to work toward the healing of the wounds of the South African people.

Bishop Desmond Tutu, an Archbishop in the Anglican Church, was named to head the commission. Public hearings were held at which victims told their stories of injustice and persecution while the nation watched and listened on national TV. At one point after a particularly painful testimony by a man who had suffered horrible pain and injustice, ***Bishop Desmond Tutu broke down in tears and began to weep,*** live and in color for the whole nation to see. Later someone said, “***I believe it was in the tears of that religious leader that our nation began to heal.***”

Don’t you suppose that it was healing for some witnesses in the crowd mourning Lazarus’ death when they saw Jesus break down and weep as well? “See how he loved him!” they said. And Jesus did love Lazarus, just as he loves you and me. **His tears are a reminder of the human side of the Master and his love for all God’s children.**

Jesus’ tears not only help us relate to him, but it shows us how able he is to relate to our experience when we lose someone we care about. It hurts when we stand by the grave of someone we love.

Dr. Robert M. Bowman tells a story that comes from a nurse in a cancer ward. Her name is Nan Pinkston. Nan's story is about a young woman named Rebekah who was admitted to her ward. Only 32 years old with eyes that sparkled and a ponytail that bounced as she talked, Rebekah had been diagnosed two weeks earlier with breast cancer. She was accompanied to the hospital by her husband, Warren, and their three daughters—Ruthie, age six, Hannah, age four and Molly, age two.

When they were finally alone, Nurse Pinkston explained to Rebekah that she needed to place a needle in her arm to give her the prescribed chemotherapy. It was then that Rebekah confessed she was terrified of needles, but, she would allow the nurse to inject her because she needed to live for her girls. When the nurse began to inject the dreaded needle into Rebekah arm she began reciting... ***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”***
Afterward Rebekah asked Nurse Pinkston what her favorite Bible verse was. “John 11:35,” her nurse replied. “Jesus wept.”

Rebekah was surprised—it seemed such a sad verse. Nurse Pinkston explained that *it comforted her to know that Jesus is sad when bad things happen to his people. It also demonstrates a human side to Jesus*, she said, that helps her when she cares for sick people.

Eighteen months later it was evident that the treatments Rebekah was receiving were insufficient to stop the advance of the dread disease. One day Nurse Pinkston entered Rebekah's room and found it cluttered with paper, audiotapes, and a tape recorder. Rebekah explained that the tapes were for her three daughters. She wanted to share with them some words of wisdom to help them deal with her death. **She wanted them to know how much she loved them. She explained to them that she was going to live with God and help Him get a home ready for them for when they were very old when they would see her again.**

Then as the end got very close, Rebekah asked Nurse Pinkston to help her make one last audio tape. She said it was the most important tape of all. “On this last tape this dying young mother spoke her last words to her daughters whom she loved so much. She explained to them that one day their daddy would bring home a new mommy, and she told them to make their new mommy feel very special and, most important, hug her often. She said she hoped that they would not be sad for long.

Then she closed with these words: “JESUS CRIED.” He knows how sad you are and he knows you will be happy again. I love you so much, Hannah, Ruthie, and Molly. ***Big hugs, your first mommy.***” Rebekah died two days later.

Rebekah was right. *Jesus' tears not only show us his human side, but they also tell us that Jesus knows how sad we are when we lose someone we love.*

That's a good thing to remember as we celebrate All Saints' Day.

We grieve for THOSE WE HAVE LOST—THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED ON--but not as those who have no hope. We know where they are.

We haven't lost them. INSTEAD We simply await that day when we will be united with them in our Eternal Home.

AMEN.