

“No Cry” Day
Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost
All Saints Sunday
November 1, 2015
Gordon Wiersma

Text: Isaiah 25:6-9
Revelation 21:1-6
John 11:32-44

My older children. Anna and Bethany, are out of the house now, so part of what that means is that now I can use them as sermon illustrations! – need to wait a bit yet with Liam and Stella. So one thing I can now say about Anna and Bethany is that when they were younger, they afforded me the opportunity to study the many nuances of crying – in other words: kids cry a lot – parenting is kind of a crying laboratory - different kinds of crying, but tears every day. And at one point in the midst of the many years of my daughters’ daily crying, over matters great and small, I had a thought: ‘when will be the first day in life that one of them would NOT cry?’ – so I developed this kind of strange research project watching for a ‘no cry’ day. And then at some point I realized: ‘I think it happened!’ - maybe it was just Anna, probably around 4-5 years old or so: there was a ‘no cry’ day- it was amazing- it felt good! There was still plenty of crying in days after that – but still – that “no cry” day was a vision of hope in the parenting wilderness!

Kind of like Isaiah and Revelation!...Perhaps you noticed that those passages have visions that echo one another - they each paint an image of what the fulfillment that God promises looks like - sounds like - feels like- they picture a fulfillment of all of creation. And both visions mention tears - the absence of tears, that is; part of the picture of fulfillment is that tears of suffering and sadness are gone - these are images of a “no cry” day on a grand scale. What has preceded these visions is much about of all that there IS to weep about in this world- the suffering and evil and brokenness that God will heal and judge and redeem - and it is for such

a broken world that these visions come: God promises a time of no tears. And did you notice what a very personal, intimate image of God is given? - God is the one wiping the tears away.

Can you imagine that? – I can't; and I'm not sure anyone can fully comprehend such a promise. So what these visions do is use images familiar to us, to help us get a glimpse of, a feel for, God's promises: it is like a feast with the best food and finest wine; like a death shroud being removed, from being covered to out into the light; like a community of peace and joy; like the best wedding party of all time; it is the earth, but a restored and renewed earth- heaven on earth. And what is interesting to me is that if you really let that vision inside of you, that vision of fulfillment- if we really try on that vision as the destiny for us and all creation...it can bring tears to your eyes to think of there being no more tears.

And I think that's because when we touch on a vision of such joy it touches on a kind of longing within us as creatures made in the image of God. There is in us a longing for true joy, for true wholeness, and when we touch on it, get a vision of it, a taste of it- there is something overwhelming about it- it resonates deep within us that this is how life is meant to be- such joy brings tears of longing to our eyes- longing to hold onto such moments. And there is a connection there to our tears of grief too - because when we touch such places of sadness, loss, suffering, pain, there is also a longing felt within us - an overwhelming sense of how this is NOT how life is meant to be. These visions of Isaiah and Revelation speak to something in us of what life should and should not be.

So then I want to bring those visions of 'no tears' alongside the story of Lazarus. Here is a story of many tears – Lazarus has died and his sisters Mary and Martha weep at their loss – family and friends have gathered- they cry. And when Jesus arrives on the scene- he is deeply moved; Jesus begins to cry – tears flow. And then as events unfold there is this stunning miracle – Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead – Lazarus out of the tomb – 'unbind him and let him go!'

Quite a while ago I used this story as part of a Bible Study with some youth – and I remember a question a youth asked: “why did Jesus cry for Lazarus but not for others? why did Jesus resurrect his friend but not others?” – I remember because that question was not part of my lesson plan: ‘Hmm – that’s a good question!’ (a good way to stall!)

It’s a little late now, but I have a response to that question... It seems to me that part of Jesus’ humanity is that he had particular relationships with people close to him: Mary and Martha and Lazarus were Jesus’ friends – he loved them like family. That doesn’t mean others are unimportant, but it is human that we have particular bonds that we hold close in life – that is good. And it also makes us vulnerable – to loss, to grief, to tears – when those we love experience pain; and so it was for Jesus too. And I would also say to that youth, that even as we see Jesus pay particular attention to this one person, the story also gives us a deeper level that goes beyond Lazarus too. As we’re told Jesus is disturbed in spirit, deeply moved, we get a sense that although Jesus’ tears here are for Lazarus, those tears come from a deeper well that knows and holds all that is broken in life. And then even as Jesus focuses on Lazarus in bringing him back to life, the gospel of John always speaks of what Jesus does as “signs” – this event is not just about this one person, this is a sign to point to Jesus who IS the resurrection and the life for all.

So for us on this All Saints day – couldn’t that pesky youth with the good questions ask: ‘why do you name just these people today? – are they more important than others?’ We have in our lives particular bonds of love; people who have been part of this community; we have others we will name with our voices and hearts this day; each of us have our own connections and tears. It is good to love and grieve and bless those dear to us; and at the same time this story calls us beyond: calls us also to grieve for those who have no one to call out their names – for those who suffer – for the brokenness around us. All Saints brings together the particular tears of our hearts

even as it opens our hearts to the tears of the world; this is a day that nurtures a faith courageous enough to feel and to grieve all brokenness – a faith strong enough to love and feel a tenderness for our own AND for our world – a faith that looks to Jesus as the Lord of Life for us and for all.

Which ends us up where we began with the visions of Isaiah and Revelation – because these visions are not just about the future: they are given to us to sustain faithfulness now. To care about the brokenness among us and around us, also opens us to, connects us with, the vision of a world formed by God’s promises of wholeness and blessing – a future fulfillment that reaches into the present, into our lives and world today, as the Spirit of Christ, the resurrection and the life, is at work within and through and beyond us. God’s fulfillment is a mystery of faith we are already a part of: God is present within our tears and calling us to enter with compassion into the tears of others; God gives new life to us, and calls us to share true life with others.

We are given a vision of an ultimate ‘no cry’ day – God’s fulfillment for us and for all creation. To try to take in such a promise can bring tears to your eyes; but in doing so, it also opens our eyes to see the Spirit of life at work in our world. Here at the table the vision of God’s new creation is revealed again; here at the table we are nourished to be a part of that vision of life today. AMEN.