

“Tears of Sadness, Tears of Gladness,”

John 11:35, Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 2, 2017

Yes, that’s right it is the shortest verse in the whole Bible John 11:35 that serves as the text for our sermon today! It’s only two words: *“Jesus wept.”*

Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man **with both a divine nature and a human nature.** **Therefore,** throughout his life and ministry, we see that he manifests many human qualities:

He could **grow** tired and grow weary.

He could hunger and thirst.

There were times when Jesus was overcome with joy and elation!

There were times when he was saddened and that Jesus wept!

There is really only one other place in all four Gospels, however, that mentions **Jesus shedding tears.** This takes place on that first Palm Sunday. Just as Jesus was entering the city of Jerusalem, St Luke tells us: *“Jesus wept over it, saying: ‘Would that even today, you had known the things that make for peace’”* (Luke 19:41-42)!

The writer of Hebrews teaches us that Jesus also shed tears—during that agonizing hour he spent in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and throughout the whole ordeal of his suffering and passion. In chapter 5, we read: *“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save him from death! Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”* (Hebrews 5:7-9)!

But why was it that Jesus’ wept in the presence of Martha and Mary and all the mourners that were there that day, when John tells us that Jesus had purposefully delayed his journey there for two days? Jesus certainly knew what the outcome of that day’s events was going to be! But still we see our Lord at work here as the **COMPASSIONATE SON OF GOD** speaking forth God’s Word to those **whose hearts were breaking and heavy with grief.**

I. A BIG PART OF THE REASON JESUS MAY HAVE BEEN CRYING IS BECAUSE LAZARUS WAS HIS FRIEND. Martha and Mary knew that Jesus and Lazarus were friends! That’s why they sent word to Jesus in the first place: *“Lord, he whom you love is ill”* (v. 3)!

Certainly there were many of the townspeople from Bethany there that day who knew about the friendship that Lazarus and Jesus enjoyed. They looked at Jesus and when they saw that Jesus was crying they also said: *“See how Jesus loved him”* (John 11:36).

Brothers and sisters we all know that we can have many acquaintances in this life; but how many people can we count on really in this world—who become—and remain all throughout our lives—true friends; sharing the kind of friendship that David and Jonathan enjoyed in the Old Testament era?

Lazarus and Jesus were friends. Was Lazarus, perhaps, one of those few men who in addition to becoming a faithful disciple also became for Jesus a true and faithful friend?

Maybe there were times when Jesus also required some “down time.” Yes, he spent much of that “down time” with his Heavenly Father in prayer, but maybe Lazarus was one of those people in Jesus’ life—whose company he enjoyed; someone obviously with whom he sat down and socialized. To use an

old expression, maybe Lazarus was one of those people with whom Jesus “could let his hair down” from time to time!

II. A SECOND REASON JESUS MAY HAVE BEEN WEeping IS BECAUSE OF THE OBVIOUS DISAPPOINTMENT THAT LAZARUS’ SISTERS HAD EACH EXPRESSED TO HIM ON THAT DAY!

When Jesus arrives in Bethany Martha, the sister of Lazarus, meets Jesus and says to him, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*” (John 11:21). Later, her sister Mary comes out and says the very same thing, “*Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died*” (John 11:32). And a little later it seems as if many of the people who were there that day were pointing the finger of blame at Jesus too! In verse 37, John voices clearly for us the question that was obviously also on the hearts and minds of many people who were there that day: “*Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?*”

Was Jesus weeping perhaps, because this is just one more of those instances shared with us in the Gospels—when people expressed their disappointment with Jesus to him?

You remember the disciples’ outcry to Jesus when he was in the boat with them one day and a real dozy of a storm suddenly churned up out there on the high seas all around them, with hurricane-force winds to boot! They were dreadfully fearful for their own lives! They were doing their best to keep the situation under their control! And where was Jesus? Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the front of the boat. Therefore they woke him up and expressed their profound sense of disappointment with him, asking Jesus: “*Lord, do you not care that we are perishing*” (Mark 4:38)?

Of course Jesus cared for his disciples, and he had proven it to them many times. He cared about them so much that once again, here too, he was going to do something very drastic to completely alter their situation. **Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: “Peace! Be still” (Mark 4:39)!**

Mark tells us that the wind **ceased immediately** and there was a dead calm upon the water. He said to them, “*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him*” (Mark 4:41)

Of all the drastic things that Jesus had ever done to prove to people that he loved them and that his Father in heaven loved them too—the most drastic thing—was, by far, when he made that long and lonesome journey to the cross of Calvary during the time of the Passover. It was precisely during this time, when many sacrificial lambs were being put to death to atone for peoples’ sins, that Jesus steps forward to become: “**THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD**” (John 1:29)! **FOR HERE WAS GOD’S OWN APPOINTED SACRIFICE TO BECOME FOR US THE SACRIFICE TO END ALL OTHER SACRIFICES** in all that he suffered in those last days of his life!

III. PERHAPS, A THIRD REASON JESUS MAY HAVE BEEN WEeping IS BECAUSE IN LOSING HIS DEAR FRIEND LAZARUS TO DEATH, HE MAY HAVE FELT AS IF A PART OF HIMSELF HAD JUST DIED, RIGHT THEN AND THERE, ALONGSIDE OF LAZARUS.

How hard it is to hear the word that a love one has died—especially if that loved one was enjoying good health and a full and vibrant life, right up until that time when death snatched them away from us! When death comes suddenly like that—it is not unusual for the family members and close

friends of the deceased to go to sleep at night, crying tears and weeping night after night—until their pillow is thoroughly soaked with tears—as they cry themselves to sleep once again!

In 1840 the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a beautiful poem entitled: “The Village Blacksmith.” And in this poem Longfellow shares the story of a **blacksmith living in the village of a great farming community in the early 1800s.**

This blacksmith was a widower who took his children faithfully along with himself to church every Sunday. **He gladly heard the parson’s preaching and praying!** But this grieving widower **especially enjoyed hearing his daughter’s voice when she was singing in the village choir!** To this grieving blacksmith, his daughter’s voice sounded so much to him **just like her mother’s voice—so that as his daughter was singing,** the blacksmith also is envisioned her mother singing her songs of praise to the LORD God Almighty in paradise.

Longfellow writes in his beautiful poem:

*“He needs must think of her once more, how in the grave she lies,
And with his hard, rough hands he wipes a tear out of his eyes!”*

IV. MAY I SUGGEST TO YOU YET ANOTHER REASON WHY JESUS MAY HAVE WEPT AT LAZARUS’ TOMB?

This reason may not be obvious to us when we read the eleventh chapter of John, but it becomes obvious when you view the Gospel of John as a whole. For in some symbolic way the death of Lazarus is a prelude to Jesus' own death.

In one of his books, a renowned Methodist preacher, Fred Craddock, recently deceased, **points us to the** similarities between the death of Lazarus and the death of Jesus. Fred Craddock points out that:

In both accounts: Jesus is troubled and weeping!

In both accounts: Jesus cries out with a loud voice.

In both accounts: Their respective tombs were not far from Jerusalem.

In both accounts: There was a large round stone that had been rolled across the entry way.

In both accounts—the stone is rolled back!

In both accounts, there is a mention of grave clothes!

In both accounts, Jesus cries out with a loud voice!

So what are we talking about here? Are we talking about the death of Lazarus or the death of Jesus? The similarities are striking—and through these similarities the Apostle John may have been hoping to share with us some profound spiritual truths! Namely:

For Lazarus to come out of the tomb Jesus would a short time later – enter a tomb!

For Lazarus to live, Jesus must die;

For Lazarus to come to believe himself that Jesus WAS/IS the Resurrection and the Life, Jesus must first go to the cross.

Some of you may know the name Rufus Jones (1863-1948). He was an American Quaker theologian, and years ago Rufus Jones went to England to preach and to lecture. While he was in England, his son back here in America died. There were no jet planes in those days to whisk him back to

America in time for his son's funeral, so Rufus Jones remained in England, while his son was being buried in America.

On the day of his funeral, his friends marveled at his serenity and his grace, and they told him so. And Rufus Jones replied, *"All our lives my son and I have loved Jesus Christ and been loved by him. And if this has been true in this life, will it not EVEN BE ALL THE MORE TRUE in the life to come?"*

Yes, Jesus wept, and we can all weep with him because death is real and it is personal and it is painful. But at shortly after Mary, Martha and many other people who were present, and Jesus also shed their tears of sadness, those tears of sadness were immediately turned into tears of gladness—when Jesus called forth Lazarus from the tomb that day!

A very short time later, the broken-hearted disciples would weep profusely those tears of sadness when our Lord was crucified! But three days later—their tears of sadness were turned into tears of gladness too!

Because of what Christ has done for us and for all, there are times already in this life—when our tears of sadness are turned into tears of gladness too! Amen