

# Sermon for Sunday, November 4, 2018 - "Tending the Tears"

All Saints Sunday  
November 4, 2018  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our readings today are awash in tears, so fitting for this day when we remember our beloved dead. In these readings we hear that God honors our tears and promises to wipe them away. God shares our tears - Jesus stands at the grave of his friend Lazarus and weeps. And, God promises a future without tears - mourning and crying and pain will be no more, and *all peoples* will feast at God's banquet.

That phrase, *all peoples*, is key. God's promise of a future without tears is not just for a few - it is for everyone.

The prophet Isaiah stresses that by using the word ***all*** four times. God will make "for all peoples a feast of rich food", and God will "destroy the shroud [of death] cast over all peoples", "the sheet spread over all nations", God will "wipe away the tears from all faces."

In God's promised future there will be no us and them, no separations, no divisions. We will all be healed together. We will all feast together.

We need this vision to give us hope in all times, and especially in this difficult time for our country.

There is so little hope right now and so much fear - fear about the future, fear about other people and their visions for the future. Fear keeps us apart from one another. It boils over into anger, hatred and violence - into pipe bombs sent in the mail, grocery shoppers killed just for being black, and elders shot down as they worshipped.

How can we live faithfully and hopefully amidst all this fear and anger? How can we be a healing presence in our world?

Perhaps we need to take a cue from our readings today and focus on the tears - pay attention to the pain within us and within other people.

Our own tears and sorrow can give us the gift of vulnerability. They can break down our defenses and open us up. They can soften us.

And we certainly need vulnerability and openness now. Initiatives like the Civil Conversations and the Better Angels Project all tell us the same thing. Rather than stridently, angrily defending our view and attacking others, we need to be vulnerable and open - vulnerable enough to acknowledge what troubles us about our own positions and open to recognizing what is admirable in others' positions.

Welcoming our own tears and sorrow can give us the gift of vulnerability and openness that we so need.

Paying attention to *other* people's tears and sorrow is important as well. This allows us to see our shared humanity and helps to nurture compassion for one another.

So many former Neo-Nazis and white supremacists say that what caused them to change was not outrage or force or punishment, though there certainly should be serious consequences for hate crimes. What does bring change for people who hate is compassion and empathy. One former white supremacist, Christian Picciolini, describes a turning point for him. He was beating up a black man when his eyes locked with the victim's and he felt a surprising empathy. About the same time, he began to get to know African-American, Jewish, and gay customers at the record store he was running. He was selling white power music but had to sell other types of music to stay in business. His customers knew he was hateful and violent, but they keep coming in and kept initiating meaningful conversation with him. He says, "What it came down to was receiving compassion from the people that I least deserved it [from], when I least deserved it."

Our compassion and empathy can be deepened by focusing on the tears and pain of others.

Of course, living with compassion, vulnerability and openness is so hard, especially as we face our own personal losses and grief. We can feel so very exposed and raw. It's tempting to fight back the tears, to defend ourselves from the discomfort, to shut others out or attack them in order to have some illusion of control.

So we need more than a focus on our own and others' tears. We also need God's presence, God's care and God's promises.

And Beloved, God is so very present with us through Jesus. Jesus knows about deep grief - he stood at his friend Lazarus' grave and wept. He knows the power of fear - he saw it in Lazarus' sisters who worried how they would survive in their patriarchal culture without their brother's support. Jesus knows about anger and divisiveness. Some of the people gathered at the grave were amazed by his love for Lazarus, others sneered, "Why didn't Jesus prevent Lazarus from dying, he healed the blind man after all." Soon after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, this anger boiled over into a plot to kill both Lazarus and Jesus.

Jesus experienced all of this and yet he continued to choose the way of love and vulnerability. He did not defend himself or attack others; he gave himself in love.

And now the risen Jesus is here amidst all the grief, fear and anger you face. He is present to give himself in love to you today. Here at this table, Jesus meets you to tend to your tears, to feed you with his love. Jesus gives you a foretaste of the feast to come in which *all peoples* will be gathered at God's banquet.

God honors your tears and promises to wipe them away. God shares your tears. And God promises you a future without tears where mourning and crying and pain will be no more, and you will feast with all people.

May this tender care and these powerful promises heal you today.  
May God help us all to bring healing and love to our tear-filled world.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.

