

1 LENT  
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1<sup>ST</sup> LUTHERAN, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

IS 25:6-9; PS 24; REV 21:1-6a; JN 11:32-44  
*No More Tears*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

In the language of the old *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, John 11:35 simply states *Jesus wept*. Those two little words were famous for shaping the shortest sentence in Scripture...which made it THE MOST POPULAR verse among CONFIRMATION STUDENTS everywhere, when charged with the task of picking a bible verse to memorize!!



Even in its **newer** version is **still** a slam dunk: *Jesus began to weep*.

It's one of **my** favorite verses – **not** because it's so **short**, but because it's so **deep**...and **not** because it's so **easy** to **memorize**, but because it's so **impossible** to **forget**...and **not** because it takes only a **second** to **recite**, but because its **few** **letters** are **filled** with such a **lifetime** of **meaning**. *Jesus began to weep*.

**What do those few words say to you? Why would Jesus weep?**

- frustrated at the unbelief of disciples?      - Mary and Martha's pain?
- Jesus' own pain at Death's power?              - Enemies in the crowd?

We are **especially** challenged in our **quest** for **meaning** by Jesus' behavior earlier in the story. When Jesus first hears from Mary and Martha that Lazarus is *sick unto death*, he basically says, *It's no big deal, he'll be fine*. And as if to **prove** that

he's not all that concerned, Jesus **waits** for **two whole days** before he **responds** to their **cry** for **help**.



Well, in the **meantime**, Lazarus **dies**. And when **Jesus** finally **arrives**, he is confronted separately by both sisters. Each says the very same thing: *If only you'd been here, my brother would not have died.*

As you would expect, **everyone** is **crying** – family, neighbors, friends – **all** are **gathered** to **grieve**, to try and **soothe** the family's **sorrows**, to **help** **heal** their hurting **hearts**, to show them **support** in this **sad situation**.

And, says our lesson, when the Lord sees them all weeping, *he is greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved... then*, we're told, *Jesus begins to weep.*

As I was writing my sermon with this verse in mind, I was intrigued by an on-line article entitled, "Jesus **Laughed**." It's a review of the New Testament-era book entitled The Gospel of Judas that **never** was recognized as Holy Scripture – for lot's of good reasons, and here's one of them:

In **contrast** to John's Jesus who **cried** at the **tomb** of his **friend**, the Jesus revealed in this "Gospel of Judas" *is a know-it-all and not afraid to show it. On the night of Jesus' final Passover, as the disciples pray to God over dinner, Jesus laughs at them for being ignorant and provincial. "They do not know," a secretive Jesus tells Judas, "that out among the stars is a blessed existence, free of the material trappings of this earthly realm." Death, for this Jesus, is simply a way to "shed" his body and return to his "pure" spiritual existence* ([http://newyorker.com/printables/critics/060417crbo\\_books](http://newyorker.com/printables/critics/060417crbo_books)).

**Not so with the Jesus of Scripture.** Far from **rejecting** the experience of *life*, the Lord *embraces* it – so **much** so that when his **friend** dies, *Jesus cries*. Those **few**

words **tell** us, among **other** things, that this **lesson** is about **death**: the **fear** it **causes**, the **separation** it **brings**, the **waves** of **pain** that wash **over** us in its **wake**. **No**, this story tells us that *death* is no **laughing** matter, **nor** is it merely a **bump** on the **road** to an **existence** where *mind trumps matter*, where *spirit escapes* the body's *struggles*, where the *perfect soul* soars away from this *imperfect life*...

From **fear** to **grief**, from **sadness** to **salvation**, this text carries us into the *cradle and grave* of the human experience.



**One** thing we **know** is that **no** one can **escape** the **sting** of **Death**. It's **not** just the **inevitability** of it, that **Death** will **be** the **end** of us **all**. **Nor** is it so much the **tragedy** of it, that **Death** cares **not** whether a person is **good** or **bad**, **challenged** or a **champion**, **self-sacrificing** or **self-centered**, **young**, **middle-aged** or **old**.

Our **problem** with **death** is that it *simply exists* in the **first** place. Ernst Becker, in his book *The Denial of Death* says that this **knowledge** is the greatest human grief: to **discover** that **we**, who are **able** to **imagine eternity**, are **only** allowed to **live** for the **briefest** moment of Time.

**That makes us weep**...and the fact that **Jesus** cries **too** is a strange but wonderful word of good news. It confirms for us what the Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians that **Death** is the **final** enemy of both **God** and **humanity**.

*Jesus began to weep*... shows the depth of God's **great love** for **all** people.

*Jesus began to weep*... tells of God's passion for our **well-being**.

*Jesus began to weep*...honors the **pain** of our **grief** and **loss**.

*Jesus began to weep*...reveals the **gift** that will **one** day be **ours**, when God **himself**, who **knows** what it **means** to **cry**, will **wipe** each **cheek**, **dry** each **tear** and **offer** that **grace-filled greeting**: "welcome home."



Theologian Robert Capon tells us that throughout his ministry, Jesus continually demonstrates, through word and deed, that he is the **resurrection and the life**. Says Capon, **Jesus never meets a corpse that doesn't sit up right on the spot. There is the widow of Nain's son (LK 7:11-17); there is Jairus' daughter (LK 8:41-56); and there is Lazarus himself. They all rise...simply because Jesus has that effect on the dead. They rise because he is the Resurrection even before he himself rises – because, in other words, he is the grand sacrament, the real presence of the mystery of a kingdom in which everybody rises (Kingdom, Grace, Judgment, p. 405).**

Says the Gospel writer John: **Jesus began to weep** (JN 11:35). Says the Prophet **Isaiah: (The Lord God) ...will swallow up death forever (and) wipe away the tears from all faces** (IS 25:7-8). Says the **John** in the book of Revelation: **(God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more** (REV 21:4).

No more tears...I like that promise. It's a word that this world is – literally – **dying** to hear!

Amen.