

All Saints Weekend (RCL/B)
Wisdom 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44
November 6-7, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Last Wednesday morning 22 of us Lutherans and Roman Catholics gathered in Fellowship Hall to continue our discussion of the TV series *The Chosen*. More people joined us in the evening at St. Denis. It's amazing how "taken" people are with these videos spotlighting Jesus, His ministry, and the puzzled, curious, sometimes critical, sometimes enthusiastic, often hesitant responses of both Jews and Romans who came to know Him or at least hear about Him. The reason people give most often for enjoying and even binge-watching *The Chosen* is: "It makes Jesus so human. He's someone we can relate to."

What are some examples **you** can think of, of Jesus being as human as we are?

- He's **impatient**:
 - when His mother asks Him to save the day after the wedding reception at Cana in Galilee runs out of wine;
 - when the Canaanite (pagan) woman asks Him to heal her daughter.
- He gets **frustrated**, for example with His own disciples' lack of understanding! He calls them "little faiths" on more than one occasion.
- He's **glad** when His disciples return from their 1st successful attempts at ministry on their own. He reports He saw "Satan fall from Heaven."
- He's **fearful** and **anxious** in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He sweats drops of blood.
- He's **sad**,
 - when the rich young man won't let go of his wealth to follow Him;
 - when He weeps over Jerusalem, and tells the people He wanted to be like a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings, and they wouldn't let Him;
 - when Peter denies knowing Him after His arrest;
 - when Lazarus dies....
- He's **mad**,
 - when He sees the money changers in the Temple, making His Father's House into a marketplace;
 - when He sees the Pharisees laying heavy burdens on widows' backs (fleecing the poor);

- when people are lining up to stone to death the woman caught in adultery;
- when Lazarus dies....

“Jesus wept.” John 11:35: shortest verse in all of Scripture. (Remember that in case you’re ever on Jeopardy!) Some people mistakenly think that crying always means somebody is **sad**. It could mean that, but it could also mean the person is **mad**. Like Jesus in today’s Gospel. We hear that Jesus arrives after His friend Lazarus has died, and when he sees Lazarus’ sister Mary crying, and her friends also reaching for the Kleenex, *“...he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”* (John 11:33:c) St. John adds that Jesus is *“again greatly disturbed”* as He nears Lazarus’ tomb. It’s important to know that *“greatly disturbed”* can also be translated *“angry.”* But about what does Jesus have to be mad??

He’s mad at **death**. He’s mad at **sin**, that brought death into this world. He’s mad at the **suffering** His dear friends Martha and Mary are experiencing. He’s mad at the present **brokenness** of this world that His Father created perfect, mad at the **sin, sickness, sadism, sorrow** that all came along with the Fall from grace “way back when.” Here’s how one Scripture scholar describes what it means for Jesus to be *greatly disturbed* and *deeply moved*:

These then are **human** feelings of the one who is the Word made real flesh and blood. But they are more. They are expressions of the agony stirred within God by human suffering. Jesus’ tortured emotions are those of the Father moved by the ravaging of humanity by pain and death. The passionate God of the Christian faith suffers when his creation suffers.¹

If we need any assurance that **God cares about what happens to us**, let’s remember that *Jesus wept*. Let’s remember how Jesus was *greatly disturbed* and *deeply moved* by the death of His friend Lazarus and by the suffering of His friends Martha and Mary, who mourned their brother.

So many people get angry with God because they're convinced God doesn't care. If God cared, would the tragic accident have happened? If God cared, would they have gotten ill? If God cared, would their loved one have died? (That's what both Mary and Martha were thinking, too: "... *Lord, if you have been here my brother would not have died.*" John 11:21, 11:32c) If God cared, would the world be in such a mess?

We're here today, either in person or on-line, because we believe that God **does** care, despite what some cite as evidence to the contrary. We're **not** here because we are somehow untouched by sorrow or loss. We **are** here because we believe Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). It is that resurrection hope, that expectation of seeing our loved ones again in Heaven, that softens our sorrow after our loved ones die. (How do people who **don't** believe they'll **ever** see their loved one again even bear their loss?)

We need to grieve our losses. We need to mourn. It's why we have funeral rituals: so that the community can gather 'round in love and support of those in deepest sorrow, but also express its own sadness over the passing of a friend, a fellow human being. Remember: Scripture doesn't say: "Don't grieve." It says, "*Don't grieve as those who have no hope.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:13) Pastor Hank has put it well. As I recall, he has said, "We know they are in a better place, but we are still sad they are not here with us." We **miss** them. That is honesty born of faith. Loss is easier to bear, perhaps, when the one who died lived a full life, or was suffering terribly. Along those lines, maybe we'd agree with "Ducky," Dr. Mallard, who commented in a recent NCIS episode, "Our pain is a small price to pay for their peace."

We have a special visitor with us today, one we don't see frequently, but whom we warmly welcome. Our guest is the first lesson from the Book of Wisdom! The Book of Wisdom is an infrequent visitor because it is not part of our Scripture "canon," which means it's not an approved part of our Bible. It's an "also ran" book that didn't make the cut in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, but Luther did acknowledge that those "other" books of the Bible accepted by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches do include material to inspire the rest of us.

This first lesson is a frequent choice for funerals and memorial services, beautiful in its honesty about the anger and sadness death can cause in us, but also emphatic about our trust in God's faithfulness, even beyond death. In the Gospel Lazarus is raised from the dead back to this life, which will not be the case for our loved ones. But because our Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, because He clothes us in His righteousness, because His death is life for us, because His suffering has atoned for our sins, we may also take comfort in these words from the Book of Wisdom:

*¹The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them...
³...they are at peace...
⁴...their hope is full of immortality...
⁷...they will shine forth,
and will run like sparks through the stubble...
⁸...and the Lord will reign over them forever.
⁹Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect. (Wisdom 3)*

Amen.

¹ Robert Kysar, *John (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament)* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1986), p. 181.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham