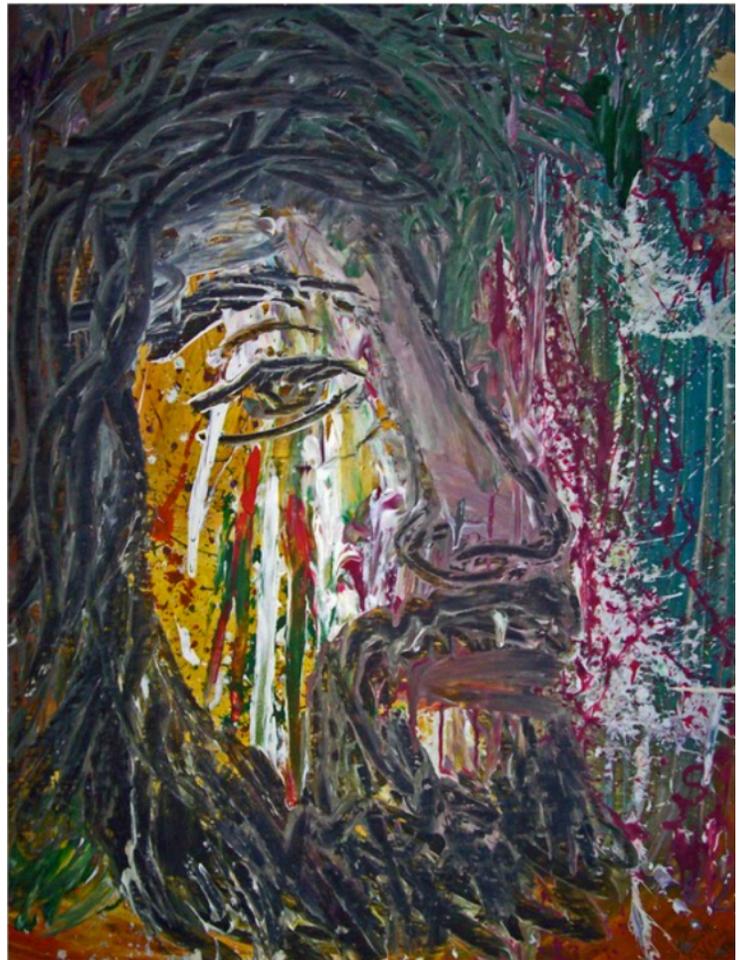


Jesus Wept...

John 11:28-41

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The Rev. A. David Paul

*Calvin Presbyterian Church
Zelienople, Pennsylvania
www.calvinchurchzelie.org*

Jesus wept in November 2019 when the virus we know as the “*Coronavirus*” or “*COVID-19*” appeared in Wuhan, China. And Jesus weeps today, nearly five months later, while the same virus is affecting people around the world. At more than $\frac{3}{4}$ a million cases worldwide¹, Jesus will weep as this hidden virus is on a trajectory that will continue to infect people around the world for months to come—their health, their finances, and their weary spirits.

This event, next to Sept 11, 2001, may be the most devastating world event of the 21st century.² And I’ve got to tell you, I’m scared. I get that the Greatest Generation is likely just that because they endured the bloodiest war, World War I, immediately followed by The Spanish Flu and smack dab on the heels of both of those, the Great Depression. But I’m still scared. I’m scared because this is different. I’m scared because this hidden Pandemic came on the heels a hidden Epidemic. The hidden, too often not discussed Epidemic of depression, stress and anxiety, especially in our young people. And immediately before that, and I believe this is AS hidden and AS not discussed, we have levels of deep division and vehement discord this country hasn’t seen since the civil war. And Jesus weeps.

The point is these poor teens are so filled with stress, so overflowing with anxiety, so deeply depressed, when they’re developmentally in a season of differentiating themselves from their parents that when they need someone they feel they can NOT go to their neighbors, can NOT to their coaches, can NOT to their teachers, can NOT to their Grandparents or Aunts and Uncles for love and support because we’re so freakin divided.

Well, it’s gotta stop and it’s gotta stop Here and Now because if it doesn’t there won’t be enough of them around to become the next Greatest Generation.

I firmly believe and have said as much a few years ago at a Key Note I did for a hundred Christian Camp and Conference leaders that there is no single institution on the face of the planet that is better positioned, that has better resources, that God has better placed to help with this than the Body of Christ, the church. And let me tell you that I’m not sure there’s a better lectionary scripture than this morning’s. And if that isn’t an act of God, In the midst of this Pandemic, this Epidemic, this Division I don’t know what is.

David and Marian Plant³ hit a bases empty grand slam (think about that) when they said, there is so much contained in so few words in this morning’s Lectionary Gospel lesson. It’s as if Jesus was saying, ***“I, the one you call Jesus, am that for which you wait and hope. I, the one sent from above, the one sent from God, I am the resurrection and the life. From the eternal one I come. From the Creator, from the life-giver I come. Those who believe in me will live not only an eternal life, but also a physical life as well. And that eternal life begins not at the tomb and not at the end of time, but with me— Here — Now. Even as we speak, Martha. Even as we speak. Do you believe this?”***

There is a cave. It is a tomb. There is a stone. It must be rolled away. And strips of cloth — cloths for burial. There is weeping. There is death.

Death comes in many forms. We recognize it best when it takes physical shape, robbing us of our loved ones and our own selves through the mortality of our bodies. This death allows no denial. The person we knew, with whom we ate and drank, laughed and argued, played and worked \is gone from this world in which we live and breathe and have our being. This death we know, recognize, mourn, and celebrate into eternal life beyond the grave.

But there are other deaths not so recognizable such as the death of dreams, of hopes, and of plans. Or the death of careers, of abilities, or of options. There is the death of relationships, of identity, of esteem, and the death of one’s own inner self. These deaths, though tormenting and anguishing, often go un-mourned and

uncelebrated for they are to us without any promise of life beyond the graves into which they fall. We, like Martha, know only that something dear to us is no more. That we are empty where once we were filled. That there is barrenness where there was to be rich sweetness. We, like Martha, hope that something, someday, will bring life again out of the barren emptiness we feel. Into the emptiness, into the barrenness of our present steps Jesus weeps and Jesus says: ***“I am that for which you wait and hope. I, the one sent from above, the one sent from God, I am the resurrection and the life. From the eternal one I come. From the Creator, from the life-giver I come. Those who believe in me will live not only a physical life but an eternal home and not at the end of time, but with me. Here. Now. Even as we speak. Even as we speak.”*** And he asks us,

***“Do
you
believe
this?”***

Jesus asks each one of us as we stand outside the tombs which dot our lives. And then he cries out to that for which we mourn ***“Lazarus, come out!”*** And that for which we weep comes forth, not as it was before its loss but restored on new terms, transformed after the loss. The opportunity to pass from death to life comes to us once again. And it will come over and over and over again, as often as we need it. It is offered by God in Jesus Christ.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, had fallen, and hid themselves from God, God fashioned clothes for them to cover their shame.

When Abram and Sarai had reached their golden years without having children, God promised them a son and delivered to them Isaac.

When Esther was a teenage bride in a foreign kingdom, God gave her the courage to stand up to a heartless king and save her people.

In hopeless situations, God keeps giving God’s people hope. When God tells us that things are going to turn out all right, we got to have faith because God always keeps God’s promises.⁴

Friends, here we stand, believing the unbelievable: that in Christ’s tears, eternal life begins not at the cave door, not at the funeral home, and not at the end of time, but *with him*, Here, Now, even as we speak. With him, the one who wept and weeps, and will weep is asking, ***“Do you believe this?”***

Yes, Lord, we believe this. We stand here on this 5th Sunday in Lent believing the unbelievable— or wanting to believe, longing to believe, needing to be able to believe— that in you, the one who weeps for us, there is life on both sides of the grave, and *that* life is ours

***Here
and
Now.***

Amen?!

¹ 678,720 <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

² Wagner, Lori, Rise Up. Collect Sermons (2019).

³ Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!: Cycle A gospel sermons for Lent and Easter by David & Marian Plant.

⁴ David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ezekiel-37/>.