

May 28, 2023

The Gospel of Luke
LXIII. The Tears of Jesus
Luke 19:28-48

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A young man had committed a serious crime and was sentenced to many years in prison. His father was broken-hearted. Admittedly, their relationship had been strained long before this, as the father had tried all he could for years to keep his son from going down that wrong road. But in spite of all this, this father loved his son with a love that was not willing to let him go. And so, every Friday – visiting day – the father would take off early from work, board a Greyhound Bus and travel across the state to visit his son in prison. But the son was angry and embittered against his father. And so, every Friday, the son would refuse to see his father.

After several failed visits, the father asked the prison chaplain if maybe he would intercede with his son – which the chaplain did, but to no avail. Every week the father would arrive, hoping to see his son. Every week the chaplain would try to intercede with the son. And every week the son would refuse – and his father would go away sorrowful. This went on for a very long time – until, one day, the chaplain could not take this weekly little drama of sadness anymore. He exclaimed to the father, *“Why do you keep doing this to yourself? No one would do what you are doing. Your son is an embittered, defiant young man. Give up. Stay home and get on with your life. No one would put up with this kind of rejection week after week. Nobody would do this!”* The father, gathering up his things for the bus trip home, said to the chaplain, *“God would do it. God has been putting up with this kind of rejection for centuries.”*¹

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!”

“He wept over it.” The tears of Jesus. They are, first and foremost, the tears of a love that just will not let us go, will not give up on us, will not turn away and walk away from us. Tears of love. For, way back in the very beginning, God had created human beings out of the overflow of His own divine love. He created us out of His love, and for His love. He created us to be the object of His boundless affection – and that we might please Him by loving Him in return, and also by loving one another as He had first loved us into being. And, for a while, everything was perfect – just the way God, in love, had created it to be. Says the Book of Genesis, God would come down into the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, and walk and talk with Adam and Eve – an intimacy deep, natural, and easy between Creator and creature.

But then it all went wrong. God didn't turn away from us, we human beings made a decision to turn away from God, to push God away, deciding for ourselves that we no longer wanted – or needed – the God who had made us in love and for love. We threw God's love to the curb and decided to pretend that we were our own creators, our own individual gods and goddesses on earth – as utterly absurd as such a pretension was at the time and still is today. And the simple truth of the matter is that when we did this, we broke God's heart. When Adam and Eve decided to break God's rules, they – and we with them, ever since – also broke God's heart.

But God, despite the heartbreak and disappointment, didn't stop loving us. In fact, God has never stopped loving us – and never will. Because that is the only way to explain everything that has happened ever since between us and God. That is the only way to account for the story the Bible tells to us – The Bible is a love story, at heart. The Bible is not a rule book, a devotional guide, a therapy manual, nor a history text – the Bible is a love story. The story of a God whose love for us has never failed, never flagged, never forsaken us in all the centuries since. The story of a God whose love for us is so deep, so broad, so high, that He resolved then and there in the Garden that He would take it upon Himself to do whatever it would take to repair the relationship that we had broken. Do whatever it would take to make things right again between Himself and His deeply beloved and yet deeply wayward and spiteful creature. Do whatever it would take to cause us to let His love enter our hearts again, that we might also learn to love Him in return again, as well as to love one another again. God resolved, in love, to redeem us and our relationship with Him. To redeem us and to make everything right which we had messed up between heaven and earth and upon the earth.

Which brings us to Jesus, looking out across the valley to the Holy City, Jerusalem – with tears in His eyes. Much, of course, had led up to this moment – and over many centuries. Like that father reaching out to his son Friday after Friday, so God had been reaching out to us century after century. He made a covenant with Abraham, promising that from Abraham's lineage would come One who would eventually bless and redeem all the peoples on earth. He raised up Moses and led His people out of their slavery in Egypt; brought them safely through the Red Sea and through the Wilderness and into the Promised Land. He sent them prophets and anointed for them kings – especially King David, to whom God promised a descendent who would rule over God's people in justice and in peace forever. God again and again declaring His love for us – even as we had, again and again, pushed His love away.

But now had come Jesus, God Himself in human flesh. The fulfillment of every promise God had ever made, the culmination of every prophecy ever spoken, the One who had come to set all God's people free. The very love of God made incarnate – made flesh and dwelling among us, so that God's love for us should no longer be an abstract question mark raised in our heads, but a fierce exclamation point written upon our hearts. Everything God's love had resolved to do in response to our rebellion was expressed in Jesus Christ – at least that's what the Bible, the love story God has written for us, declares: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*² *“God shows us love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*³ *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*⁴

And that is what we see in the tears of Jesus as He looks out over the Holy City – we see just how much we are truly loved by God. Despite it all. In spite of it all. In spite of everything in us, everything in this world, that treads so carelessly upon His love, ignores His love, rejects His love, avoids His love with a cruel mix of indifference and utter defiance. Look upon His face. See those tears rolling down. He is weeping for us. He is weeping for the love of you and of me and of every human being ever upon the face of this earth. Has anyone before ever wept for you, for the love of you, like that, like Him? The Son of God is weeping for us, weeping for the love of us. And weeping because at last the moment has come for Him to show us upon His cross the lengths to which His love is willing to go to bring us back, to enfold in His arms once again, to make us His and to make Him ours once again and forevermore. Just like it was in the garden, once upon a time.

Jesus weeping for us, weeping for the love of us – just look and see how much you are loved by God. But perhaps also, as He looks out upon that city filled with the fullness of the human condition – all of the good, the bad, and the ugly of human existence – could it be that He is also weeping with us? Weeping for the love of us, truly – but perhaps weeping also with those in that city, those here on this earth, who also weep? With those whose tears have become their food both day and night, as the Psalmist puts it.⁵ Weeping not just for how we have broken His heart, but weeping also for the pain and the suffering we inflict upon our own hearts and upon the hearts of others. Weeping because this, too, breaks His divine heart – man’s inhumanity to man. Weeping because this, too, He has come to set right. Because this, too, He has come to overcome. Not just all that we have done to Him, but all that we do to one another. Jesus having come, not just to forgive our sins, but as the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of this sick and sorrowful world.

I came across this story years ago, in a sermon by a wonderful Episcopalian preacher named Fleming Rutledge. She tells of watching a *60 Minutes* segment about a massacre which was at that time occurring in Algeria. Christiane Amanpour was interviewing a man whose entire family had been killed by soldiers who had burst into his house and just started shooting. In the segment, this man walked through his home, showing her the bullet holes in the walls, the bloodstains on the floor, the place where he hid himself and watched this slaughter, unable to do a thing to save his family. But Rutledge says that he said and did all of this in a very dispassionate tone, as if he were a journalist or a tour guide – which made Rutledge wonder why he did not seem to be feeling anything. After the tour was finished, the camera turned away from him to other things. But after a minute or two, the camera turned back to this man, seemingly unaware as he sat at a little table in his house with his head bowed down in his hands, silently weeping. Just great big tears rolling down his face and onto the table beneath. And in those silent tears, says Rutledge, seemed to be revealed the truth of his pain – indeed, the truth of this whole wide world filled with pain. That things are not how they are supposed to be, not the way God created them to be. That our sin has unleashed suffering upon suffering in the world God created to be good.

And with that, Rutledge then turns to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, weeping over the sins of His people, and she writes this:

*Jesus’ tears encompass the entire human tragedy: he weeps for the Algerian man and his family, **and also** for the killers of this*

*man's family. In the tears of the one man Jesus, God's complete solidarity with human pain, yes, **but also with human sin**, is shown.⁶*

Jesus weeping, not just over what we have done to Him, but also over what we do to ourselves and to one another. Jesus entering into the sin and suffering of this broken, messed up world – that He might take all of it into Himself and take all of it upon His cross. Take it upon His cross, that our sin and our suffering shall be overcome at last.

The tears of Jesus reveal His love for us. The tears of Jesus, as He looks out over that Holy City of Jerusalem, also reveal that He weeps with us when we weep. And, for both those reasons, the tears of Jesus also point us towards one thing more – they point us toward that glorious future day when His tears and our tears shall be no more. Because of what He has come to Jerusalem to do – His Cross and His Resurrection – now we can know, now we can truly hope and believe, that there really will come a day when all our tears, God's and ours, shall be no more. A day when we will once again walk in an intimacy deep and natural and easy with our God, and also with one another. A day when we shall no longer hurt or destroy each other. Because of what Jesus has come to Jerusalem to accomplish, there will come a day when, as John's Revelation describes it, *"He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore."*⁷

That day when not only will God wipe away the tears from our eyes, but also from His own. And we will live, God and us, in that glorious joy that He always intended for us and for Himself. We will forever live, God and us together, in the way every good love story is always supposed to end – happily ever after, in the never-failing, never-ending, never-giving up love of our God.

¹ William H. Willimon, "Sin As a Byproduct of Worship," sermon accessed on-line at www.chapel.duke.edu/sermons/020898.htm. Link is no longer active.

² John 3:16.

³ Romans 5:8.

⁴ I John 4:10

⁵ Psalm 42:3.

⁶ Fleming Rutledge, "The Tears of Palm Sunday," in *The Undoing of Death* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p. 8.

⁷ Revelation 21:3-4.