

“Facing Sadness”

June 26, 2016

Luke 13:34; 19:41-44

SI: For the past 9 weeks we’ve looked at a wide variety of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people that give us insight into how Jesus loved. After examining how Jesus loved people, we’ve pondered how this applies to us and our interactions with the people God has put in our lives. Throughout this series I’ve leaned heavily on Paul Miller’s book *Love Walked Among Us: Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

This morning is the last sermon, and I’ve chosen to end it on a note that may seem surprising. We like triumphant endings. We like happy endings.

And God’s big plan and grand design is happy in the most profound sense.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived
what God has in store for those who love him.

He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Heaven and eternal life will be a world of love, a world of intimacy and joy.

But we’re not there yet. And until we die and go to heaven, our experience of love in this fallen world is often tainted with sadness. How do we face that sadness?

INTRO: Allison and I spent most of the week in Mobile at the annual General Assembly of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. It was a good assembly. I came away encouraged by the health of the PCA. But the highlight of the General Assembly is not the business and reports, it's seeing old friends and classmates in the ministry. Hearing about their families and churches and talking about old times, sometimes after not seeing them for years on end. But sometimes in those conversations there is deep sadness.

I talked to a seminary friend who told me about a visit he had had with one of our classmates. This classmate is no longer in the pastorate. He left several years ago after a painful church conflict. My friend related how this classmate and wife are now embittered toward church. And even worse, their oldest daughter, who is about the same age as my own daughter Adrienne is so embittered that she has left the faith. As my friend was relating this story, he expressed anger toward the way the church had treated our classmate, but his overwhelming emotion was sadness. He was deeply saddened by the response of this family to the wrongs done to them and the way bitterness and unbelief had ravaged their faith and taken joy.

Then I ran into a couple who were college classmates. I hadn't seen in years. We went to different seminaries. He then went into military chaplaincy. They told me all places stationed over the years. I asked them about their children. They said: We have two younger daughters. They told what they were doing, how they were walking with the Lord. I could tell their daughters brought them great joy. Then they said: And we have an older son . . . They hesitated and looked at each other. Right in front of me I saw expressions of mutual sadness pass between them. And the dad said: We don't know what our son is doing. Neither one of them said anything else, and I didn't ask why estranged. Their sadness said enough.

Later I bumped into the wife of a pastor friend. She began to tell me about their son who is a very devout Christian. He loves the Lord, shares his faith, has led friends to Christ, active in church—but he suffers from debilitating depression. He's been under the care of several psychiatrists, he has gone to Christian counselors, but he faces a daily battle to even function. She told me he had called her the evening before, called his mother, and

and told her some church friends wanted him to go out to eat and see a movie. She explained he had called her because he was so fatigued and depressed that all he wanted to do was turn off the lights and get in bed.

But he has learned it's best if he fights against that urge.

He knew he needed to make himself go out with friends, whether he felt like it or not. So he had called his mother just to get that little push of encouragement to drag himself up and out the door.

She had cheerfully told him that he ought to go, friends would love to see him.

But as she related the conversation to me,
her eyes filled with tears of sadness over the pain of her sweet son.

In this fallen world, love and sadness often go together.

The more people you love and the more deeply you love them,
the more likely you will be saddened by their rejection of you or things you value,
saddened by their self-destructive beliefs and decisions,
saddened by their irremediable suffering.

Maybe you're sad about someone right now.

So how do you face the sadness that sometimes comes with love?

How do you deal with it?

How did Jesus deal with it?

Two main points, I'll give them to you as we go along.

And then one more thing to say at the end.

MP#1 Take comfort in the knowledge that Jesus Christ himself was often deeply sad.

The Gospels show us again and again Jesus experiencing sadness because of the actions and situations of those he loved.

As a Christian it can be comforting to know our Lord was sad too.

He was a Jew and he loved his fellow Jews.

He wanted them to love him and enjoy all the blessings of his love. Listen again to how he expressed himself. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem” Jerusalem stands for Israel as a whole, Jerusalem is the heart of Israel. He calls out the name of Jerusalem with deep feeling.

“How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.”

Moving toward someone is the basic motion of love.

He longed to move toward them, to serve them, protect and for them to respond. When danger threatens, little chicks scurry under their hen’s wings.

In fire, hen burned to death, chicks survive under her protection. “But you were not willing.”

They didn’t want to move toward him in love, rejected his overtures of love.

We can’t hear the tone of Jesus voice, but if could, would hear sadness, heartbreak.

I think of that college couple I bumped in to, the Navy chaplain and his wife And how he said: We don’t know what our son is doing.

I heard the sadness of rejection in that dad’s voice and saw in that mom’s eyes.

Jesus didn’t say: Oh well, that didn’t work out. Their loss.

He didn’t say: I have a Father in heaven, so I’m not sad.

He didn’t even say, Being God is enough for me—he was sad at rejection. Don’t tell yourself if had more faith wouldn’t feel crushed.

Jesus was sad over rejection by those he loved.

There’s comfort to be found in his sympathetic experience.

Then there’s this other passage we read, Luke 19, triumphal entry.

For those of you went to Sunday school as a child, think of the pictures of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, surrounded by cheering crowds.

People are waving palm branches, little children shouting Hosanna.

How is Jesus usually depicted in Sunday school art?

He’s calm. Maybe he looks a little robotic and detached.

But what does Luke tell us Jesus began to do as he crested the Mt. of Olives

and saw Jerusalem? He saw Jerusalem and began to weep.
Weeping as he rode through the cheering crowd. Not in Sunday school art.
If you've been here these past nine weeks,
you'll recognize this familiar pattern in Jesus.
He sees and then he feels. He looks and then moves toward the person in love.
In this case it's not just one person but a city, nearest to his heart.

What made Jesus sad?

Not just that he knew his own people would reject him by week's end, crucify.
Sad because of the self-destructive path the Jewish people had chosen.
They rejected God's peace in the Messiah.
"If you had only known this day would bring you peace, now it's hidden."
Jesus knew that would lead the Jews to seek their salvation in politics
and military rebellion against Rome which would destroy them.
He prophesies the terrible destruction that will come on the city.
A siege, the massacre of men, women, and children.
Leveling every building so not one stone left on another.
Which is exactly what happened about 35 years later when Romans sacked
Jerusalem after the Jews revolted. A million Jews died, temple burned.
Jesus was sad over the self-destructive behavior of those he loved.

I think of that friend of mine telling me about visiting our old classmate.
He was angry at how the church had treated the man,
but he was saddened by the bitterness that had taken root in his heart,
and the unbelief that had taken root in his daughter's heart.
This friend of mine didn't weep—but he was saddened by what appeared
to be a self-destructive response to the wrongs that had been done.
You know how hard it is to break through to a person in that condition.
The way of peace was hidden from them, usually more trouble is ahead.

And there are lots of other examples of Jesus being sad.

He sighs deeply over the man's deafness. He weeps at Lazarus' grave.
Even though in both cases he worked a miracle, human suffering saddened him.
If you are sad over someone you love—
that person's rejection of you or estrangement from you,
his or her self-destructive behavior,
what appears to be, barring a miracle, that person's irremediable suffering
Start with this—Jesus was sad too. A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.
MP#2 When you are sad, imitate Jesus in the way he dealt with sadness.
Dealing with sadness is like walking on a narrow road with cliffs on both sides.

You can fall off one side by suppressing or ignoring your sadness.

Or you can fall off the other by dwelling on or wallowing in your sadness. Jesus didn't do either. He accepted his sadness and he grappled with it.

Let's read another passage. Turn to John 12:23-28.

Notice where this passage is located.

Right after the triumphal entry. Right after weeping over Jerusalem.

Jesus begins to think seriously about his coming death.

Vs. 23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

He compares his coming death to a seed that dies and then that comes alive when it is buried in the ground and produces much fruit.

He's talking about his resurrection. And he says that whoever follows him will have the same experiences of death and resurrection.

But then Jesus' thoughts about his approaching death thoughts trigger more deep emotions and he says: "Now my heart is troubled."

It's the same expression used to describe his feeling at the graveside of Lazarus, and it's used later to describe Jesus' feelings about Judas' betrayal.

So it seems that it was not just his death that troubled him,

but his death at the hands of those he loved and came to save but who had rejected him and were intently pursuing their self-destructive paths instead of God's peace.

Now what Jesus says next shows how deeply he entered our world and experience.

What shall I say? Father save me from this hour?

His emotions were so overwhelming that Jesus felt like running.

He felt like he couldn't take it. And he was honest about it.

He didn't try to act like an unbending oak tree and tough it out.

He was basically admitting, I want to beg my heavenly Father to take it all away and make my life pain free—all the sadness, all the grief—just take it away.

Maybe you've felt that way about the pain caused by someone you love.

But look how Jesus answers himself: No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

Even though I want to ask my heavenly Father to make my life pain free—

this is where he has me now and this is where he wants me to be, in this sad place.

So Jesus doesn't deny his feelings. He says I'm troubled. I'm sad.

But he says no to what his sadness is pushing him to do—

whether to run or check out or respond with anger or self-pity.
And then Jesus says: Father, glorify your name.
He starts worshipping. When you worship God you proclaim his will is perfect.
You trust in and rejoice in his unchanging goodness.
You quit demanding that God or other people take away your sadness.
The seed of what you want for this person or thing you love has to die.
That's sad. Don't pretend it's not. Be honest. That sadness feels like death.
But when you are able to worship God, trust him, praise him, will be a harvest
of good things in your heart and life.

So what does this look like? Let me read you a story from Paul Miller's book.

My friend Bryan was Chief Operating Officer of a small family-owned company. He had a good relationship with the boss/owner. His boss had even talked with him about the possibility of Bryan taking over the running of the company and becoming CEO. That good relationship collapsed when Bryan went to his boss about the way he treated some of the employees. As a self-made man, the boss was not used to criticism. He began to exclude Bryan from meetings and criticize him in front of the other managers, but because he needed Bryan's skills to run the company, he didn't let him go. Because of Bryan's family situation, finding a new job was not an option. He was trapped. Bryan came to me and asked for advice. He related that when his boss put him down, he's freeze in a confused combination of hurt and anger. When I described to him how Jesus experienced sadness, it gave him a new framework for relating to his boss. Later he described to me in detail a meeting when he began to respond differently. His boss had just criticized him again in front of the other managers. What he said was not true, but there was no point in getting into an open spat with his boss. Bryan realized his boss was not going to change and treat him with respect. As the demand for his boss to change drained out of him, he was left with a sense of loss. Then he remembered what Jesus said and thought, "It's ok for me just to be sad. It's ok for the seed to die." By being faithful in his work, not running, not lashing out, but quietly serving his family and his boss, he realized he was serving Jesus. It was a relief for him simply to be sad. Right there in the meeting he recalled Jesus' comment, "My Father will honor the one who serves me" It occurred to him, "The one who made the universe is going to honor me." Bryan told me he found his heart worshipping, actually being joyful, in the middle of his sadness.

This man quit fantasizing about running from situation—he couldn't. Hemmed in.

Also quit allowing it to drive him to anger or self-pity. Quite wallowing in it.
He accepted it. I'm sad. Sad about broken relationship, fall out from that.

But for now this is where my Father has me. I'll serve him here. Trust Jesus.
That pastor's wife I mentioned, the one with the depressed son.

Her sadness was unconcealed. But as she spoke to me, she was worshipping.
Every other sentence was a worshipful expression of confidence in God.

It killed her to see her son like this, seed of what she wanted seemed to be dying.
Yet she was able to say in the same breath that she could see the Lord working

in her son's heart a deep empathy for suffering people and a profound desire to tell them about this God he clings to every day.
She didn't say: I'm not sad: Hallelujah. Deny her pain.

She didn't say: I hate God, he's not fair, and wallow in it.
She did something amazing: I'm sad. Hallelujah. The Lord be praised.

That's all I have to say about facing sadness.
Take comfort in the fact that Jesus himself experienced it.
Strive to imitate him in the way he dealt with it.

But before I end this message and this series,
there is one more thing I need to say about this subject of love and sadness.
Jesus loves you, and because he loves you, he's sad for you.

When he sees you responding to the wrongs you've suffered
with bitterness, withdrawal from church, cynicism, and unbelief—he's sad.
Jesus is angry about the wrong that was done to you.

Remember, that's part of Jesus' love too. We studied a few weeks ago.
He's angry when people he loves are wronged and abused.
But he's sad when you respond to those wrongs by forming a hard shell
around your heart that cuts you off from sources of his grace.
Just like that pastor was sad for his old seminary friend who's become bitter
and withdrawn and his daughter who has rejected her faith.
Angry at how the church treated them, but sad for their response.

Jesus loves you and he's sad when you estrange yourself from him.
You don't have to do it by outwardly rejecting the faith.

You can be a regular church-goer and thoroughly estranged from Jesus.
It all happens in the life of your mind and thoughts.

It's all about what you long for and dream about and fantasize and trust.
You can sing and pray and take communion—but where is your heart?
Do you love Jesus and his kingdom or do you love money and surrounding yourself
with a fortress of luxuries and comforts and making sure things are just so?
I think of the sadness in that father's voice when he said:

We don't know what our son is doing.
And that look of sadness that passed between him and wife.
Jesus is sad too when you estrange yourself from him.

Give him lip service but don't care deeply for what he cares about.
Jesus loves you and he's sad when living in this sad old fallen world hurts you.
He's going to make things right one day.

He will wipe every tear from your eye and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things will pass away. The kingdom of summer will come and we'll leave the dark valley and step out into a broad, sun-shiny place.

But until then, Jesus is sad about the hurts you suffer. He lived here.

He wept. He was troubled. He wanted to ask his Father to jerk him out.

So it is from personal experience in this fallen world he is sad for you.

He feels your hurts as deeply as that mother I spoke to felt the hurt of her son's depression.

The prophet Isaiah says:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

We could go on and on about the love and sadness of the Lord Jesus.

What a wonderful thing it is to have a Savior who loves you and is sad for you—even when you stray and do foolish things.

The most important question of life is: Do you know him?

Do you trust him?

Have you given yourself to him body and soul?

How terrible it will be for you to hear this sermon,

to hear about this wonderful Jesus and his love not believe in him, and not scurry under his wings like chicks under the mother hen.

Because the fire of God's judgment against sin is coming,

when you die, you will all stand before him and give an answer for life lived.

If you have rejected Jesus and his love, if you've trusted other things, worshipped other things, then just like those Jews who trusted plans and politics—you'll be exposed and defenseless on the day of God's wrath.

Jesus will be sad for you then, but having rejected his love throughout your life, his protection will no longer be available.

Now is the time to believe. Today is the day of salvation.

Love walked among us in the person of Jesus.

If you haven't believed in him and returned his love, don't delay.