Sermon Text for July 14, 2013

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Jeremiah 3:21-25, John 11:28-37

“Why does God weep?”

I’ll never forget the first time that I saw a grown man cry. My dad wasn’t really the crying type, at least not in front of the family. It was 1977 and Pele was speaking to a packed stadium in the Meadowlands thanking the crowd for their support and their love at his last game ever played. When he was done the greatest player ever to play the sport of soccer covered his face and wept, I mean sobbed on national television, and he kept his face covered until his teammates gathered around him.

Now I find myself when I watch an overly sentimental commercial or a Disney movie with a poignant ending there are tears streaming down my face. I know from behind the pulpit you’ve seen me get emotional. There was a time that I hope is behind us, or I’m in trouble, when it was thought that a grown man crying, to say nothing of weeping, was shameful. I grew up that way to some degree.

But then we are faced with our Scripture for today and those of us who grew up old school where grown men don’t cry we find not only a man who weeps but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who in the shortest verse in the Bible is simply described as weeping. How does it make you feel to hear that your God weeps?

Why does God weep, we ask today. Is it because of the lost opportunities and potential that he sees in all of us as we squander it away. I know that when my girls get hurt and it is serious I wonder how their future will be affected, will they be able to do everything that will bring joy in their lives. Maybe God weeps because of our lack of understanding. If we would only trust in God’s provision and love then we wouldn’t have to lean on our own understanding. Or maybe God weeps because of our misdirected focus. We tend to concentrate on those issues that have no eternal value and spend all of our time in that which rusts and moths can consume.

Ultimately the tears of God reflect God’s desire for our life and the possibility of that desire being unrealized. The tears of God ought to serve as a motivation for each of us to strive after that which God wants for us, knowing that it will always be good. Let’s see if we can discern God’s desires for our lives and how e can bring joy to Christ in our lives.

**READ**

Last year one of the neighborhood kids stopped by the house and asked if we could help with a fundraiser. Of course, we said. We’ve said yes to every single fundraiser because what pastor wants the reputation of not helping the community kids. So I get a year’s subscription to Time and Newsweek and something called Birds and Blooms, or something random like that.

A few weeks ago Time Magazine had on their front cover the new name for this current generation. You know, there was the G.I or greatest generation, then the silent generation, then the baby boomers, then the generation Xers, the Millennials, does anyone know what the most recent generation is called? At least Time Magazine called this generation the: Me, Me, Me generation. Apparently it is the most narcissistic, selfish generation that spends it’s time taking pictures of themselves and posting them online. When I read that I wanted to defend this generation after all on Tuesday I’ll have three teenage girls in my house. I’m blessed and they aren’t anything like that. Is this generation any different from any other generation that has lived on the face of the earth?

The prophet Jeremiah seems to think not as he who is called the weeping prophet, the one called by God to portray God’s feelings about the current situation and all he does is weep. He describes in our first reading the weeping of Israel’s children because they 1) perverted their ways and 2) forgotten the Lord their God. While the Scripture describes this as a plaintive cry of the people of Israel it can also be attributed to God who literally mourns and grieves the fact that his people have both in deed – perverted their way, and in word –forgotten the Lord, turned their back on God and proved their unfaithfulness.

We talked last week about forgetting God in our actions but at least we profess to be Christians. Jeremiah calls out the people and know they are making god sad by both their actions and their thoughts, their complete disassociation from God. How do you make God sad, I mean, if you are God and you are sad because your people aren’t listening to you and doing the opposite of what you want them to do, you just make them do it, right? You send a flood, wipe them out, and then start over.

That was tried with limited success. What do you do as a parent? When you punish you always hope that when they get older they will make the right decision because your discipline brought them along that path. But as they get older, and continue to make the same mistakes and once they leave the house and get into more trouble, then it breaks your heart because you did everything you could. You are starting to see why God weeps.

The Bible is a compilation of human bloopers that aren’t funny at all as they reflect our continual mistakes and bad judgments over time. History can be retold primarily along the years of when the wars were fought, not when people had God moments.

And so today in John we find the shortest verse in all of Scripture and it states: Jesus wept. The one who was sent into the world in place of God’s nuclear option, like the flood, God said I’m going to give them one more chance to see who I am, to want to love me and have a right relationship with me, and to do the right thing. I’ll come to earth myself and show them the way.

But they make him cry. We find other places in Scripture where Jesus weeps, not just here. We find in Hebrews 5:7 a scene that depicts Jesus probably in the Garden of Gethsemane where he is seen as offering up prayers with loud cries and tears. He even had sweat pouring off of him like blood. We see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41 because the people were constantly striving after war and not peace and they had forgotten their Lord. This theme of humanity turning our back both in our actions and in our faithfulness or understanding of who God is has been a part of our MO even in Jesus’ day.

But the story in John doesn’t end with Jesus weeping. It doesn’t end with him throwing up his hands and leaving the scene disgusted with us and with humanity. No, let’s look at John. Jesus is right where we left him after speaking with Martha, on the outskirts of town. Martha goes to her sister who is back home and tells her that the teacher is here. Note she doesn’t say the Savior, the Messiah, the Son of God, she doesn’t even say rabbi, an endearing term. She calls him the teacher.

Mary quickly leaves the house and sees Jesus and falls at his feet. It seems like every single time that we find this Mary with Jesus she is at his feet. She is there listening to him teach while Martha serves, washing his feet with perfume while he eats, and here meeting him by the cemetery and prostrated at his feet. And she greets Jesus with the same guilt inducing greeting as her sister did: If you had been here my brother would not have died. She was weeping, the entourage of professional mourners following her were weeping because as we saw last week 4 days had passed so Lazarus is, what’s that saying, dead as doornail.

What happens in vs. 33 is curious because for some reason it is not reflected in the English. We read that he was “deeply disturbed in Spirit and deeply moved.” Deeply disturbed is actually in the Greek the word that means angry and deeply moved means literally trembling. When Jesus sees this exaggerated scene where death has at least in the minds of those gathered won a decisive victory he is infuriated.

Where is he? Where have you laid him? They say come and see. Come and see. Back in John 1 Jesus also says come and see. In vs. 39 when his newly picked disciples asked where he was staying, where their new home was going to be, Jesus said, come and see.

Jesus the light inviting his disciples to a life of newfound possibilities and now the townspeople inviting Jesus, the light of the world to the grave of a friend who succumbed to death. It’s enough to make a grown man cry. Jesus’ weeping was not as they thought because of his love for Lazarus and all was lost. Jesus’ weeping was a recognition, and a sadness, over the fact that they had so much to learn.

But learn they must. Next week we meet Lazarus in the cave. He allows the impossible to happen for God’s glory which was his plan all along. Jesus weeps because of our seemingly inevitable march toward win where we have all we need, when he’s taught us all we need to know to act and believe in a way that is consistent with who he is.

I think God is weeping over what will happen as a result of the Zimmerman trial, which actually became a trial of Trayvon Martin, and a trial of gun control, and a trial of systemic racism. God calls for peace even in the face of injustice because it is the only way. God weeps so we would change, so it would get our attention. Have you ever seen your father cry? I can’t recall a time that I did, except one, and it really got my attention. The sending of Jesus to die for us was not an easy thing. It hurts, the results of our actions on us ought to reflect our gratitude.

Revelation 21 tells us that God, the one who wept for us, will wipe away all of our tears. Why? Because death will be no more. Jesus wanted Mary and Martha to understand his victory over death but you can’t hear Jesus when you’re surrounded by people who only want you to see death and impossibility.

We are going to the mountains this week. Vacation Bible School is a sign of the Kingdom of God coming here to Strasburg to this church. This week God will be here smiling and laughing because His children will be learning about Him an learning that death has no place here, it has no sting, there is no victory. This week we have the opportunity to wipe the tear from God’s eye as we celebrate the least of these coming to see his face lit up in laughter.