

God Will Wipe Away Your Tears

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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November 4, 2023

All Saints Day: Year A: Mt 5:1-12

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Revelation 7:9-17 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” ¹⁴I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;

¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

God's comforting grace be with us on this All Saints Day. Amen.

Last Saturday, October 28th, famed Hollywood actor Matthew Perry unexpectedly died. His role as Chandler Bing in the long running TV series, Friends, endeared Perry to people all over the world. We laughed and cried watching all the crazy things Chandler and the rest of cast got themselves into. Throughout this past week, people posted to social media about their grief. "I'm beyond devastated." "There will never be another Matthew Perry." "An incredibly talented actor and kind man whose life was cut too short."

We've all known this kind of grief. It is grief that feels like a bad dream. Like all the shades have been pulled down and nothing will ever let the sunlight in again. People have been known to say to God, "This hurts so badly, why did you ever have to create such deep love between people?"

As we grow older the losses increase. It's not only one friend's funeral. We lose multiple people in any given year. Death isn't our only grief either. Covid remains an active virus. We live with deep loneliness or depression. There are lost dreams and disappointments. We watch as Alzheimer's takes the beautiful mind of a loved one. These bodies don't seem able to do and be what they once did and were. We give up our drivers licenses and lose independence even though it is time. There is an increased sense of instability on the world stage. Reports of wars, the kidnapped and bomb shelters all ramp up our anxiety. These are all losses.

We need to pay attention to our spirits, minds and bodies when we are grieving. But also, when the losses and everyday anxiety begin to pile up. The experts will tell us to rest, exercise, get sunlight and abstain from alcohol. Church is also a good place for healing. Jesus knew that.

Jesus preaches quite an astonishing sermon whereby all the outcasts who live lives of anxiety and loss, get center attention. He says, "Blessed are all those who never get any attention. By social or economic standing, they are dismissed. Blessed are the people who spend time in relationship with God; who hunger for all that God is. Blessed are those whose tears run fast. You might think that God is far from you. Instead, God is right in your midst. You, are honored by God. God sees you. God knows you. God loves you."

Jesus didn't only preach it to those within ear shot. He preaches it to us. God blesses and knows we who struggle when the bank account falls \$40 short each

month. God accompanies us when our spouse has more doctor appointments than social engagements. God sees us when the everyday tasks of life feel only like a burden. God cries with us late at night or in the car when no one else will ever hear our tears. “Blessed are you,” Jesus says. “I love you.” Blessed are we.

It is this sacred promise that brings us hope. God’s promises bring us a new future. I’ve shared this story with you before. But it is powerful, so I share it again.

In Zimbabwe, there is a custom to gather in cemeteries on the first anniversary of a death. They actually have a second funeral. I was privileged to attend one. We were at the gravesite of a young mother, one year after she had actually died. There were four or five ministers all dressed in long white robes. About 100 people also gathered; the family and friends of this dear woman. Since the service was conducted in the local language, my host mother whispered in my ear as the pastor spoke.

He said, ‘One year ago, we gathered here in deep grief. We were overwhelmed by the loss of our sister. Her death left us in despair. Today we come ready to remember and celebrate her beautiful life.’ Remember they did. Several family members and friends stood up to tell stories of how she was a great mother and wife, how she impacted her congregation with her faithfulness, how she loved Jesus. The storytelling continued afterwards over a meal at the family home. It was a day to remember a saint whom Jesus loved.

The mourners were changed by God’s promises not only to this young mother, but also to them. Because promises move us forward! The promise that God had this woman safe in God’s eternal care, allowed the congregation gathered to move forward. They’d been stuck in grief. Now they celebrated.

Promises are spoken descriptions. But promises also bring about new reality. If you promise your child something, and then fulfill that promise, you create a new reality for your child. It is an ice cream treat or day at the zoo that wasn’t expected. Or if the grocery store advertises a sale in the Sunday papers, the reality is when we get to the store, that item truly costs less than it usually does. God’s promises create new realities for us. They compel us forward into a new ‘future not defined by the past.’ (<https://www.davidlose.net/2014/10/all-saints-a/>)

Because of the joy of the Lord, the saints in the Book of Revelation gathered around God’s throne. They worshiped God day and night. God revealed it to St. John who described the reality for all of us to see. “They will hunger no more. They will thirst no more. The Lamb will be their shepherd. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. People of God this is a promise for us! Imagine it! People of every nation being bombed today, living in constant fear. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. For the people who stand on streetcorners hungry. For those who are full time caregivers for their grandchildren falling into bed exhausted beyond their years. For we who have fears and doubts about our futures. God is our shepherd. God wipes away our tears.

This doesn't mean life will come up smelling roses. Wrestling with grief and loss, we struggle. We wrestle with faith questions that often don't have easy answers. The saints of the church have always grappled with God. Recall the struggles of Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John the Baptist or Ignatius. They all got on their knees and prayed in times of trial. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote while he was in prison during WWII, "May God in His mercy, lead us through these times; but above all, may He lead us to Himself." (Letters and Papers from Prison, p.137, Hymns Ancient and Modern, Ltd.) John the Baptist even sent messengers to Jesus to say, "Are you really the One? Or shall we wait for another?"

This kind of wrestling doesn't mean we are faithless. We don't make God upset when we shake our heads or fists in God's direction. Just the opposite. We are taking our faith seriously! When at our lowest, God honors and blesses our struggle.

People of God – today we remember with joy that God has welcomed home the saints: our loved ones, and all those gone before us. People of God – you too, are the saints! Remember today and always that God sees you. Honors you. Blesses you, and the promise holds true: God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

To God be the glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.