

“Jesus Wept...”  
Scripture Lesson: John 11:32-44  
The Rev. Dr. William E. W. Robinson  
Salem Presbyterian Church  
All Saints’ Sunday  
November 4, 2018

Please join me in prayer.

This past Tuesday, I joined several hundred members of this community at a prayer service for the eleven people who died at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. For me, the most poignant moment was seeing on a screen a picture of each person killed and hearing a brief but personal biographical sketch of each. People wept.

Maybe you wept, too, at some point. As I sat there that night, I thought of the words of seventeenth-century English poet John Donne: “Any human’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in humankind.” I also thought of our fundamental belief that each of them—and all of us—are created in the image of God.

Some of you wept this past week after the death of long-time member Becky Wood or long-time member Dottie Denison (or both). Of course, if you live long enough, there will be times in your life when the grief of loss, the toll of violence, the weight of tragedy are just too much, and you weep.

Like Jesus did.

In the Nicene Creed, we affirm that Jesus was “fully human” and “fully God.” It’s a basic Christian belief. More times than not, though, we focus on the “fully God”: the Jesus of miraculous

healings, awesome “signs and wonders,” and a gravity-defying walk on water.

Focused on the “fully God,” we often lose sight of the “fully human”: the Jesus who lived and breathed, ate and slept, had good days and bad days, and experienced *every* emotion we’ve experienced. Because he was “one of us” (in the lyrics of a 90’s hit song).

So seeing Mary and the others crying, seeing their grief at the loss of someone they dearly loved, someone he dearly loved, it hits Jesus. He’ll soon raise Lazarus back to life, but *in that moment* I believe he’s moved by their grief, he’s moved to tears himself.

Jesus’ tears here, his expression of grief, puts flesh and bone on the psalmist’s promise that “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.” Jesus cries *with us*, just as he cried with Mary that day. He’s moved by our grief, even as he was moved by Mary’s.

And he *knows* our grief because I believe he grieved himself that day. *In that moment*, Jesus saw the hole that death and loss can bore into a person’s heart. He knows what it means to lose someone you love.

So Jesus grieves with the families and loved ones of each person buried in Pittsburgh last week. And he grieves with the family and loved ones of the two people killed at the yoga studio in Florida on Friday. He grieves with them because before the victims were anyone else’s children, they were *God’s* children.

I like what a colleague and mentor of mine sometimes says at times like these: “God is the first to cry.” God was the first to shed

tears that fateful, horrible Saturday; the first to shed tears Friday night. And we believe that because his Son shed tears himself.

Jesus wept...and he also raged.

Two times we read that Jesus was “greatly disturbed in spirit.” I agree with commentators who say that translation doesn’t do justice to the underlying Greek. Eugene Peterson’s translation in *The Message* expresses it better: “a deep anger welled up within him.”

*A deer anger* welled up within Jesus. Why was Jesus so angry? He raged that day at the sin, sickness, and death in our broken world and what they do to us: the pain, the hurt, the sorrow, the grief, the gaping holes they tear in our hearts.

Have you ever done that? Raged like Jesus does here? I have. I’ll never forget one time in particular. I’d just visited someone in the hospital. As I walked down a long, empty corridor to an exit, tears welled up in my eyes, and anger boiled up within me. I raged at cancer; its unforgiving, unmitigated assault on someone I loved.

I wasn’t alone. Jesus did, too. I believe he rages with us. Because—of all people—Jesus knows and deplors the hell-bent forces that afflict us, assault us, ravage us, grieve us in our lives.

And—of all people—Jesus could do something about it, and that day he does. He raises Lazarus from death to life: “Lazarus, come out!”

Raising Lazarus from death to life, Jesus showed that sin, illness, and death do *not* have the last word. (In the words of a beloved hymn: “Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.”)

Raising Lazarus from death to life, Jesus showed that we shouldn't grieve as those who have no hope (in the words of the apostle Paul).

Raising Lazarus from death to life, Jesus showed the power of believing in him, the Resurrection and the Life!

Raising Lazarus from death to life, Jesus showed a preview of his resurrection and our own. (Though Lazarus wasn't resurrected as we will be, Jesus's raising of him that day anticipated the resurrection.)

So that we believe:

God raises Dottie Denison from death to life!

God raises Vi McClure from death to life!

God raises Judy Painter from death to life!

God raises Jean Partin from death to life!

God raises Gary Stovall from death to life!

God raises Bob Webber from death to life!

And God raises Becky Wood from death to life!

Alleluia! Amen.