

Luke 13:31-35

Tears. Frustration. Grief. Sadness. Jesus felt this as he was heading into Jerusalem. He wanted the people to correct their ways and turn back to God's love. But they were as human as we are today. Don't we feel the same frustration, grief, sadness, maybe even tears? So many churches today feel that way as their attendance dwindles, the apathy takes over the people in the pews and maybe even their pastor, there is fear of the culture that surrounds them. So many people, for some reason, have decided they will not return to church, they're now called the "dones" and so many have never been introduced to Jesus or attended church, they're referred to as the "nones". It appears the world is becoming more agnostic, more chaotic. And the reason many of God's people who claim to be faithful aren't in the pews?

There is the legitimate, "I can no longer navigate my body to make it to worship." However most of the reasons are excuses, "We can watch it on TV or YouTube." "We can't get involved." "We don't have time." "We have soccer or baseball or basketball." "We sleep in." "It's our only day off." "I don't do church." "I don't like Christians." "I don't believe in God." "I'll handle it my own way." "I can't hear you." It's so difficult to reach someone when they don't want to hear the good news about salvation that comes from Jesus Christ. You may even have a situation like this in your own family. You know. God knows.

Sometimes we think, "If we could just go back to the time when our church was full and our Sunday school rooms were packed, things would be better." That was a special time. If we read about the first churches that Paul planted in 1st or 2nd Corinthians we would realize even they did not get it right. There truly has never been an age of perfection when the church got it 100% right. Every generation is challenged with this, and it hasn't been just the past few years that the church has been in decline, although it has accelerated in recent years (Graham and Burge, *The Great Dechurching*. 2023).

But we still wonder, "What is going wrong here in our church?" Sometimes it is simply because we haven't tried. We haven't reached out to the people around us; we haven't been Jesus to the world. Sometimes there is simply nothing wrong. Sometimes you can't move a mountain no matter how hard you try. Sometimes there are people and things you just need to leave to time, prayer, and God. And it hurts. If you look at the scriptures, you find God expresses sorrow and frustration. Especially in the book of Lamentations.

God tries from Genesis to Revelation to present times to urge all people toward caring for the triune God. Jesus continues to be the good shepherd who brings the lost sheep home. And God will continue to try until the last sheep is brought home to protection, safety, joy and peace. God's shepherds mourn when they love people as God does and the people do not respond.

We see in today's scriptures that Jesus mourned over those who would not or could not believe he is God's son who came to show us who God really is, and to take away

the world's sin. Jesus lamented over the people who would not listen, nor change the ways that he knew would only lead to dire consequences. Mourning, sorrow, grief, tears, are normal human ways for us to respond to what has been lost and cannot be found or saved. Being Christ-followers does not spare us from the losses in our lives, we do feel grief, sadness, sorrow, we feel the loss. It's ok to mourn. It's ok to cry.

Jesus mourned Jerusalem, not once, but several times, as we see in the gospel of Luke. In our scripture today, he mourns that they won't listen. On the final day when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he will cry over God's beloved city, and God's beloved children. Tears of loss. Tears of a breaking heart.

Sometimes, the ones we want to save the most, our best friends, and closest relatives are the ones we can't save. It's easier to save those who have no connection to us. But when those closest to us don't listen, won't move, we mourn. We cry. Our heart breaks. And it's okay to cry. Mourning, lamenting, crying, frustration. These are true demonstrations of the kind of love that runs long and deep. The kind of love that involves loyalty, and trust, and sacrifice. A lament for one of God's beloved that you cannot save means "not in this time or place." It doesn't mean "not ever." But it means perhaps not "you."

Knowing this may not help you to feel better. It doesn't stop the flow of tears from coming. But a lament is for a season. And God always wins. Jesus knew that God would win in the end. Jesus loved all of God's children so deeply, that he wanted to save them from the consequences of their own choices, consequences he knew would come to them. We know that Jesus loved the poor, the sick, the lowly. But we see here in today's reading, that Jesus also loved the Pharisees, the Priests, the Teachers, the abusers of those poor and lowly. Jesus even loved from the very depths of his heart the ones who wanted to kill him. He tried desperately throughout his ministry to reach them in every possible way he could. Jesus wanted to bring all of Jerusalem back to God, all of these lost Sons. And he wanted to do it now. He realized he couldn't. The consequences would have to happen. And Jesus mourned. Jesus lamented for those he couldn't move, those who were most difficult to save, those who were supposed to be the closest ones to God and yet separated themselves the furthest from God. These were God's children, God's shepherds. These were God's prophets who had gone astray. How that must have hurt. If there's any passage in which we see the truth of Jesus as owning God's heart, it is in this one, when Jesus mourns the fate of those persecuting him the most and speaks of them as his children.

Jesus' lament for the Pharisees, for the Priests, for Jerusalem, for God's prophets and teachers, comes from the depth of his love for all of God's children. His frustration is one that comes from the love of relationship, of engagement and, commitment. His is a love for a people, a community, a faith, and a place where it all took place from the beginning of time. Jesus' lament comes from a parent's response to a wayward child. Jesus' tears are that of a broken heart --God's broken heart.

Jesus calls the Pharisees chicks that he wishes he could hold closely. Yet he knows he can't. So he tries persuasion. He tells parables to wake them up. And still, they don't listen. Jesus' frustration is evident. His grief is real. The intensity of his emotion when he cries, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem...." is the clue to the depth of his wrenching grief. He wants to shelter Jerusalem under his wings. He wants to teach them the way, so that their devastation can be averted.

Jesus sings a psalmist's song. Jesus prays a prophet's prayer. But a Song of lament is still a song. A prayer of lament is still a prayer. Jesus prepares to continue his mission, strong in the knowledge that his grief is only a prelude to a much larger symphony. He will do what he can in his human time. Soon he will enter into God's time. And He will do in the heavenly realm, what in this realm he could not. In the end, God always reigns victorious. The prophets knew it. David knew it. The Saints knew it. Jesus knew it. And you know it too.

Jesus may not have saved every person in "real" time. But God's time transcends all time. This is what kept Jesus going, even to the cross. This too is what keeps us going. This is what gives us hope—this is our trust in the midst of grief. God will not be without a witness. So we cry our own tears of lament, tears for the violence, the apathy, the poverty, the degradations of our world. We cry for those we cannot move, we cannot save, for those who refuse to listen, who push God away. We cry for what we cannot do, and render our frustrations for what we don't know how to solve.

But we too know what the saints before us knew without a doubt –that God is not finished. All things are possible in God's time.
And God will be victorious.
Not in our time. But in God's time.
All glory be to God.