

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

ANNO † DOMINI 2023

“Stop Crying”

What do you say to someone who’s grieving? “I’m sorry for your loss”? “It’s going to be OK”? I’ll bet you *don’t* say what Jesus said to the widow at Nain: “Do not weep,” or better yet, “Stop crying.”¹ How could He say something like that to someone who had suffered so much? It’s bad enough that this woman was a widow, having lost her husband of who knows how many years before this. But now she’d lost her son, her *only* son. This is extremely tragic, no doubt accounting for the considerable crowd from the town that was with her in the procession. It also meant that, unless she had the means to support herself, or relatives who could do so, she would now be dependent on public charity for her survival. She’d be a beggar.² It’s an incredibly sad state of affairs, one at which we would *all* weep. And the first thing out of Jesus’ mouth is, “Stop crying”? Is that really how Jesus feels about our sorrows? He just wants us to get over it and be joyful all the time?

There is a certain contingent of Christianity that believes that. That if you’re among the saved, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you’re not allowed to be sad anymore. You’re supposed to be *joyful*, all the time. And if you’re not, then there’s something wrong with you. Doesn’t the apostle Paul say, “Rejoice in the Lord always”?³ He also exhorts the Ephesians, saying, “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”⁴ So, they say, you *must* be joyful, in every circumstance, *or else*.

Now, the problem with this is that it denies the reality of human suffering. And I’m not just talking about death, although that is what all suffering ultimately points to. “In Adam all die.”⁵ But in Adam all also suffer the whole range of what it means to be human in this world corrupted by sin: pain, sadness, weakness, fear, etc. And that includes the baptized. Christians are no

¹ The force of Jesus’ words is, “Do not weep *any more*,” i.e., “Stop crying.”

² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, p.198.

³ Phil. 4:4.

⁴ Eph. 5:18-19.

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:22.

exception, for being born again in Christ does not mean that we are no longer Adam's children and so unlike our unbelieving neighbors.⁶ If anything, it means that we will feel that suffering more acutely. After all, we are not called by our Lord to put *down* our cross, or *ignore* it, but to *take it up* and follow Him who suffered and died on a cross for us.

In other words, *it's OK to weep*. It's OK to acknowledge the grief you feel when the wages of sin is exacted from you, in however small an increment. You don't always have to experience joy. Sin is a *slavemaster*, death an *enemy*. Even *Jesus* wept when faced with these things.⁷ He didn't tell Mary and those who wept over Lazarus' death that something was wrong with them. He wept *with* them. He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled at the sight of what sin had wrought.⁸ He knew more than any of them how wrong it is when God's people suffer. How this is not the way it's supposed to be. He showed that there is truly a season for everything, and a time for every matter under heaven, including a time to weep.⁹

But while there is a time to weep, there is also a time to laugh. "Weeping may tarry for the night," we heard earlier from Psalm 30, i.e., it may linger, hang around, "but joy comes with the morning."¹⁰ There is an *end* to suffering. The pain and the sadness is *not all there is*, not when Jesus is there. And that surely is what Jesus meant when He spoke to the widow at Nain. For we're told that the reason He told her to stop crying is because when He saw her He had *compassion* on her.¹¹ These weren't words of disapproval, "be joyful, or else." He wanted her to know that because *He* was there, there was simply no need to weep anymore.

Just after this, Luke records that John the Baptizer's disciples reported this very incident to him in prison. "And John, calling two of the disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" And Jesus responds, saying, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to

⁶ Phillip Carry, *Good News for Anxious Christians*, 138.

⁷ John 11:35.

⁸ John 11:33.

⁹ Eccl. 3:1, 4.

¹⁰ Ps. 30:5b.

¹¹ Luke 7:13.

them.”¹² Good news like, “Stop crying,” because here *is* the one who is to come. The answer to John’s question is yes. Jesus, in spite of what the crowd thinks, is *more* than a great prophet, even greater than Elijah, who himself raised a poor widow’s son.¹³ For Jesus comes to raise *all* sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. He comes to take away their sin, to bear their griefs and carry their sorrows, so that one day He can stop *all* funerals and raise all the dead, and give eternal life to all believers in Him. No more sin, no more sadness, no more pain, or loss, or anything that causes us to weep in this life. It’ll all be gone, forever, because Christ, who was crucified, has been raised.

And so, Jesus raises the widow’s son, so that we will know that in Him there is hope. That when He is here, when the one who is to come comes again on the Last Day, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes.¹⁴ To be sure, God has ways of comforting us *now* in the midst of our sorrow. Our Baptism reminds us that we are claimed, and that nothing can separate us from His love. His absolution assures us of our standing before God: forgiven, restored, and at peace. His Supper sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. These are precious gifts, for which we give thanks.

So we grieve, but not as those who have no hope. Can you imagine what it must be like to grieve without hope? To have no joyful expectation of eternal life with those we love who have departed in the faith? To hope in this life only, with its endless procession of tragedy after tragedy? The author of Hebrews tells us that it was for the joy of the resurrection that our Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross, despising the shame.¹⁵ It is this same joy that sustains us. Not that we must feel a certain way all the time, but we recognize that there is something to be joyful *about*. Something good has happened that changes everything, and especially the worst things. In Christ, all pain is temporary, death is like sleep, and blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.¹⁶

In truth, God *is* sorry for your loss. He knows how much it hurts. But He also promises it’s going to be OK. It may not seem like it now—weeping may tarry for the night—but God gave His Son, His *only* Son, for you. So, whatever

¹² Luke 7:18-23.

¹³ 1 Kings 17:17-24.

¹⁴ Rev. 21:4.

¹⁵ Heb. 12:3.

¹⁶ Matt. 5:4.

you are suffering, whatever the reason for your tears, may God grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.¹⁷ And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting, where the only tears will be joyful ones.

Amen.

¹⁷ Eph. 3:16-19.