

Jesus' Beatitudes: Heavenly Wisdom to Chart Our Reset

Matthew 5:1-5 ~ Isaiah 61:1-4

Blessed are those who Mourn

5th Sunday after Pentecost ~ July 5, 2020 ~ Sacrament of Holy Communion
Communion Meditation ~ The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

*The Beatitudes are not only a map for Christian life,
but are the secret to Jesus' heart itself. —Jean-Claude Sagne*

“Are you crying? There’s no crying...There’s no crying in baseball!” shouted Tom Hanks playing former Cub slugger turned resentful Coach Jimmy Dugan in the 1992 film, “A League of their Own.” In this now iconic exchange at home plate, a player of his burst into tears in response to his very loud, very public, sarcastic, criticism of her bad play. There may be no crying *in* baseball, but there has certainly been crying, *about the lack of* baseball, since the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to wipe out the entire 2020 Major League baseball season. But now that period of mourning is giving way to sweet anticipation: In a couple of weeks America’s pastime begins again! Perhaps a resurrection of a sort. Play ball!

Although some of us may know how to control our tears--especially men in baseball dugouts—there *is* crying throughout life. On and off the field. From the moment we are born, our tiny baby bodies announce to the world, “I can breathe!” by letting out a lusty cry. Until that cry is heard, everyone in the birthing room holds their breath, waiting anxiously. At that first moment, as Louise Erdrich has written, we are “no longer beneath our mother’s beating heart.” Our first experience of life at birth begins in loss. But that is only the beginning. From that first cry at the shocking loss of our safe, cozy mother’s womb, all the way to our last breath, where often a tear escapes and finds its way down our silent, still face: our lives are inflected with tears and with loss.

Of course, nobody *wants* to mourn. Nobody looks forward to the chance to experience hurt so deep that it shudders the body and rocks the soul? We don’t like grief and pain. Where is the blessing in that, Jesus? Yet Jesus’ second beatitude proclaims to his rag tag crowd of followers on the mountain that day: If you are mourning right now, that’s right the tense is definitely present: Blessed ARE you, Happy ARE you who are mourning right now. “What?” “Wait, what did he say?” Put down your lunch and listen up. This is different. Yes, the multitudes on the mountain that day were astonished.

How can that be? What did he mean? How can mourning and loss really be a blessing. This second shocking, paradoxical, yet at the same time Torah-traditional beatitude, offers a special gift for us on this Independence Day weekend. As we ponder the gift of tears on this 4th of July weekend that commemorates the birth of our nation, I hear a call. That call is from Jesus. 244 years ago, at the signing of our Declaration of Independence, could be considered the first cry of the USA beginning to be born. Today in 2020, Our true independence, the liberty we proclaim and for which we stand, is crying out to us.

You can hear it in the streets, you can see it on our screens: Tears speak a language we all understand. Listen to the pain. Let those tears water the seeds that will grow into oaks of righteousness. Right here in our hearts and in our land that was birthed with a vision our immigrant founding fathers brilliantly articulated. They declared the USA would be a nation where *all* people are created equal. A nation where there really is liberty and justice for all. Every person. The birthing of this vision calls to us today.

Right now is our time. This is our only chance, to do our part in the little amount of time we are given on God's good earth to bring this vision along. Jesus set a similar vision in his beatitudes. They show us how to reset the balance. This second beatitude sprang forth from Jesus' lips from the words of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 61. This scripture found in what we call "Third Isaiah" was written to the people of Judah who had just returned from the devastating experience of their Babylonian exile. Still bruised and hurting, not sure who they were now that they were back from that crisis, or how to move forward. Isaiah poetically prophesied the vision of mourning as birthing God's new creation.

The surprising lesson in this beatitude for us today, is the entry point, the new creation Jesus opens up for all of us. I will put it like this: It's about *mourning*, instead of *moaning*. More specifically: letting God bind us together in the shared work of binding each other's broken hearts—rather than letting our pain turn into moaning and complaint. Instead of letting our loss, our pain, our tears turn into griping, groping, grabbing what we can. Listen to what those tears are teaching us. And just maybe from our shared mourning, will grow the shared compassion that leads us on the road toward justice.

"And Jesus wept." John 11:35. A favorite verse for anyone involved in Bible verse memory competitions or "sword drills." It is the shortest verse in the Bible. The easiest to remember. And yet—it may be the most important verse for us as Christ followers to really remember deep in our hearts and to live by. Why? This verse tells us that our God and Savior, while on this earth in human form *did* really cry. More than once. This verse teaches us the depth of Jesus compassion for his friend Lazarus who had just died, and his shared grief with Martha and Mary. It shows us that Jesus' first gut response was shared mourning with Lazarus' sisters. He shared that deep grief, in the language of tears. That came first before Jesus miraculously raised Lazarus from the dead.

In Luke 19:41, just after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he weeps over the city, saying, "If you, even you, had recognized the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." Yes, Jesus' heart was breaking, Jesus was weeping for the people as a whole. He mourned their blindness, their resistance to his message. While hanging on the cross in his final moments of agony and tears, Jesus comforted his grieving mother. Yes, our God wept salt tears throughout his earthly life.

We serve a God, who weeps with everyone who is weeping today: Whether it is over the summer we had imagined—the camp we look forward to attending every summer, or the trip we had dreamed of taking that is now lost. Or if it is our job we lost, or a vocation that has collapsed

in the wake of the pandemic: we are swimming in a sea of loss. We mourn the 132,000 lives lost to the coronavirus and all the lives those souls were related to. We also mourn all the lives lost in service to our country in all the wars fought since the Revolutionary War. We mourn the lives lost to mass shootings in schools, houses of worship, and public places. We mourn the lives lost on the street and in people's homes' because of the color of their skin or their gender identity. We remember the Trail of Tears shed by the Indigenous losses caused by the Indian Removal Act. We know that Jesus wept. And is still weeping.

I believe that the experience of loss and mourning is something we all share. It cuts across all the divides that we devise and bedevil us. The "Paraclete" which is another word for Holy Spirit, means "comforter." Giving and receiving comfort is Divine work to which we are all called. Regardless of where we are from, who we vote for, who our family is, or what baseball team we root for. Like Jesus, we all weep. Some of us with tears that can be seen, others with tears that only God can see.

In those tears we can find the grace and courage to comfort one another. The blessing of mourning can lead us forward, healing the soul of our nation along with our individual broken and breaking hearts. Nine-Year-old Oskar Schell, fictional character in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, lost his father to death in the World Trade Center on September 11. In this story which Oskar narrates, he describes a vision he had for what to do with the collective grief that weighed so heavy, something he described as "heavy boots." Oskar says, *In bed that night I invented a special drain that would be underneath every pillow in New York, and would connect to the reservoir. Whenever people cried themselves to sleep, the tears would all go to the same place, and in the morning the weatherman could report if the water level of the Reservoir of Tears had gone up or down, and you would know if New York was in Heavy Boots. And when something really terrible happened—like a nuclear bomb or at least a biological weapons attack—an extremely loud siren would go off, telling everyone to get to Central Park to put sandbags around the reservoir.*ⁱ

I hear Jesus telling us, his followers, to get to the Central Park that is right here—at his Table. At this Table we can weep and be reborn. This is our chance. This is God's gift and call to us. We are in a time of reckoning that offers an opening, an opportunity, to share tears and to listen to them. In that comfort is our resurrection.

ⁱ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, (Houghton Mifflin: New York, NY, 2005), p.38.