

## ***Sometimes I Cry***

Genesis 45:1-15, Luke 6:27-38

Center Church, Hartford

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Although currently our President feels there is a national emergency of threatening people coming over our border with Mexico, most people know that, at least for women and children, the most dangerous people to them are often in their own families and neighborhoods, and that is true across all races, ethnicities and family incomes. We read about it in the news here in Hartford. I just read a devastating book called *Educated* by a woman named Tara Westover which tells of terrible abuse in her rural, Mormon family in Idaho, and some of us in this room undoubtedly have experienced or are experiencing the pain and struggle and fear that comes when people who are supposed to love you do not.

Sadly, church leaders and clergy have sometimes used the Bible to tell victims they just need to put up with it. They should, in the words of today's readings, "turn the other cheek, love your enemy, be nice to those who hurt you and pray for your abuser."

Let me say again as I did earlier that clearly that Jesus is not talking about that in this text! I can never figure out why anyone would tell a victim to do these things but not require their abuser to do the same thing! What if we turned this around and said to those who abuse "Do to others as you would have them do to you! If a family member does something you don't like, don't hit them, turn the other cheek, be nice to those who hurt you and pray for them." Why don't we hear about that happening!

Sometimes when I see the ways the Bible and religion have been used as weapons, I cry.

Sometimes when I hear the stories of people suffering at the hands of those they thought loved them, I cry.

Sometimes when I see the way so many fall into spirals of hurt and hate and revenge right in their own homes or neighborhoods, I can't figure out what else to do but cry. And I think of how all the disciples of Jesus through the centuries have utterly failed to help people live the kind of love he taught. And I cry.

I am beginning to think we need to do more weeping together, more acknowledgement of the wrong of hurt and hate, publicly. Maybe if more of those who hold such anger, fear and hate could simply weep, somehow healing could happen. Time for Holy Tears.

I subscribe to a daily poem that comes in my email. This month they have been featuring poems by people in prison. On Tuesday, this poem appeared.

Sometimes I Cry, by DJ

I told a million lies now its time to tell a single truth  
Sometimes I cry  
It's hard dealing with my pride  
Not knowing whether to fight or flee  
Sometimes I cry  
Hard to maintain this image of a tough guy  
When deep down inside I am terrified  
If I ever told you I wasn't scared, I lied  
Struggling to make it back  
To society and my family  
I cry  
I cry for my son who I barely see  
Due to these mountains  
And me and his mom's beef  
I cry for my siblings who never knew their older brother  
Because he stayed in the streets  
I cry for my grandma who is now deceased  
I cry for my life, half of which they took from me  
I cry for my anger and rage  
The only emotions I can show in this place  
I cry for how we treat each other inside these walls  
I cry for the lack of unity we have most of all  
When will it end I want to know  
Till then all I can do is let these tears flow.

All I can do is let these tears flow.

One of my colleagues this week remarked on how often in the Joseph story we read today he cries. At one point, he wept so loudly, we are told, that the Egyptian guards outside his room heard it! Now Joseph at that time was a

powerful man in every way. Surely Joseph had anger and rage in him, for much wrong had been done to him by his brothers. The whole “Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat” thing has made this story into a Disney-esque show, but this is not a trivial or lighthearted tale. Joseph had been tossed into a pit for wild animals to eat him. By his jealous brothers. Who then thought they could make money off him by selling him into slavery. He served as a slave; he was imprisoned on a false accusation, he could have been killed at any time. In his words, by the power of God he was saved, and now he was in a position to exact severe revenge. He had power and he could certainly have used it to have his brothers killed, tortured, enslaved, or imprisoned.

Instead, he cried.

He cried for lost years with his father and baby brother.

He cried remembering the hate between his brothers and himself in their youth.

We are told he went to each of his brothers and “wept upon them.” And then after that, they talked. This reconciliation story is not simple; if you read the several chapters preceding the reading for today, you see that first Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were still obnoxious and greedy, knowingly falsely accusing them of theft to see if they would respond with honesty and humility. He did not lightly or quickly forgive them for trying to kill him and then selling him into slavery in his youth.

But things had changed for him, and he very much wanted to love his brothers as he wanted to be loved by them. Powerful as he was, he was not afraid that tears would make him look weak. He wept tears that held all the pain of the past in them. What had happened was not erased, but the path to a new relationship with his brothers had been made more possible by those tears. And, we are told, their tears as well. No posturing. No rage. No revenge. No defensiveness. The vulnerability of tears.

I want every man and boy in this room to hold the model of Joseph here, since we live in a society where, still, boys and men are demeaned for crying, called weak or “like a girl” as though being a girl is a bad thing. Where, like the poet we heard, the need to maintain the image of a tough guy takes away the healing and release of tears, the vulnerability that does not signal weakness, but can bring reconciliation instead of hurt, that can make a family

and a neighborhood a safe place for everyone in it. Tears that can soothe the pain of the past and not carry it into the present.

And women and girls, do not hold back your tears or be ashamed of them or let anyone shame you for them. Those tears build our hearts into dwellings for the Spirit of extravagant love, Jesus kind of love.

And all of us need to remember that this place, this sanctuary, is a place that can hold our tears! When someone says to me that they didn't come to church because they thought they might cry, I say, "Exactly! That's why you should come!" Tears are holy, here. Given the state of the world and of many of our individual lives, tears seem to be a response that can be healing. Sometimes, as we heard in the Joseph story, we need to "fall upon [each other's] necks and weep."

Three times in the Gospels we are told that Jesus wept. Once when his friend Lazarus had died and he grieved with Lazarus' sisters and Jesus' friends Mary and Martha.

The second time was when he looked out over the city of Jerusalem with all its struggle and pain and needless hurting of one another, and he wept. Imagine Jesus looking out over Hartford, where four people were killed in anger this week alone.

The third time Jesus wept was the night in the garden when he prayed for another way than his death to help human beings find a way to love.

Have we? Can we? As the poet said, "I cry for the lack of unity we have most of all/When will it end I want to know/Till then all I can do is let these tears flow."

May our weeping not be in vain, but holy, leading to strength of spirit and reconciled relationships and loving homes and neighborhoods. We do know the way. Let us not be afraid to follow it, and help others into the way as well. Amen.