



“AS THE WORLD YEARNS”
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 23: 1-12
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
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If you love, you grieve.

And grieving is love--embodied in our cells, our nervous systems, our muscles, even in our bones.

Denying this about ourselves, our bodies, our connections, our lives, actually creates disease in all of these layers of existence--bodies, relationships, life on earth.

The thing about grief is that even though it is etched in the way we are made that we need connection, therefore we need to grieve--even though we are wired for grief, it is strenuous and it hurts.

So, as with anything that is strenuous and anything that hurts, human beings can try to avoid these things.... Just like exercise or eating enough vegetables or hard physical or emotional labor--these things may be good for us, but they can be difficult and heavy and uncomfortable and time consuming.

And so we can look for ways to take short cuts--and our minds and bodies can be schooled in things like denial and lethargy and avoidance and instant gratification.

And Western culture--tangled up with patriarchy and white supremacy--has bundled with it lots of cultural messages about grief and about love. These messages like “men don’t cry” or “emotions are a sign of weakness” or “women are too emotional” or “stop being a baby” or “suck it up” ... messages like these attach things like shame and manipulation and aversion to the healthy processing of grief.

So Western culture has been a poor teacher of grief--we’ve been shown more models of just stuff it down and keep going, just numb the pain and act like you are fine, just put on a happy face--than we have been shown models of healthy grief--that takes time and energy and support--similar to laboring in birth, grief fully engages our bodies and is a physiological and cellular process that flows with more vitality and health when there is warmth and support.

(Tears image and MMS)

Grief is yearning--for what has been lost, for the sensations of connection, for a sense of safety and well being, for the familiar, for that place or that someone or that way of being in the world that helped to define us. And that yearning is a messenger--calling us toward balance, toward truth, toward healing.

Today we are remembering--losses that have changed us, that have made our hearts heavy, that have shifted the way we move in the world. Today we are acknowledging the power of love and the pain of loss and the promise of remembering.

The other thing about grief is that it is shared--it is collective.

In fact, some evolutionary science suggests that tears strengthen social bonds and elicit feelings of warmth and empathy. Seeing someone cry who has been touched with emotion can humanize a person, make them seem more accessible and relatable.

Remember how we are wired for love and therefore, grief? Just look at the physiology of tears alone.

(Tears video: <https://youtu.be/keMF8YzQoRM>) (3:58)

Tears tell stories of the collective--which is why we need tears and why we need each other to help process the stories they tell.

Not only are there physiologically different kinds of tears; tears also carry cultural and community harm and pain. Tears also invite reflection, recognition, and regeneration.

And the complexity of how to find health and balance in our bodies is deeply impacted by culture.

Crying can also be perceived as manipulative and even dangerous given the power dynamics in a situation. The dynamic of white women's tears in conversations about race or in cross-racial spaces is an example of this weaponizing of tears. White women's tears can be a trigger for BIPOC because of the impacts of white supremacy and the history of white violence.

The immediate impact of white women's tears in conversations about race can be that whiteness is centered--the white woman's pain and discomfort becomes the focus instead of the pain of a BIPOC who just shared a painful story about how race has impacted them. White women's tears also have a violent history--as the distress (whether real or feigned) has been license for white men to do things like lynch Black people or engage in other forms of terrorism and extra judicial violence.

Because grief also comes from the brokenness of our collective--of our communities. Broken trust can arrest the healthy flow of grief--deep into our cells and bones. Broken trust can be what morphs deferred grief into chronic collective disease--like patriarchy, like white supremacy, like Christian triumphalism, like institutionalized brutality, like state-sanctioned violence, like all kinds of violence.

All Saints is about the holiness of grief--the sacred quality of sitting together and listening to the wails of loss, of regret, of confusion, of hurt and to extend gentleness

and truth telling and trust in all directions--to each other, to ourselves, and to the ancestors.

All Saints is about this collective need we have to trust each other with our grief.

For generations, we have struggled to trust each other with our grief.

Jesus' body tells the story of this broken trust and the chronic diseases that ensue--those diseases that arrest our capacity to grieve together--these chronic diseases that thrive when love is not nurtured in its revolutionary capacity.

These chronic diseases trivialize love and fool us into thinking love is only things like niceness, romance, sentimentality.

(Baby crying picture)

Love is the life-blood of human society--it is the super power that humanity was gifted with--the power to transform, the power to heal, the power to honor the primal place that pain begins--it begins in separation.

That is where love expresses itself in grief in our earliest formation--the cries of separation--and the yearning to connect. Babies vocalize because they want to connect--that's how they get food, safety, warmth, sense of well being, language, identity.

Jesus' body tells the story of how the collective can mistake stress and strife as an opportunity to abandon love for other concerns like appearances, respectability, power, influence, status. When actually stress and strife are an opportunity to strengthen love--that's when we can restore balance--that's when we can realize the commonality of our most basic needs as human beings.

(back to just MMS)

Jesus isn't just criticizing religious officials who were his adversaries in this passage. He is warning his own followers about how easily piety can succumb to false consciousness and how quickly religious practice can habituate separation. He is warning all faithful people that piety used as a weapon to shame and blame is piety that is no longer connected to love.

The crux of the Gospel writer's message is never stop yearning for truth and connection--this is what love is about: truth and connection.

When religious piety becomes an end in itself instead of a means to love, then that piety has become a tool of harm.

Think about it--if all that we do is for love--then love is the litmus test for how we yearn. For our yearning to be Spirit-led, its origin must be love. And its object must be a better world for all that lives and breathes. How could we not be humbled by such truth--we are that connected--that our yearning can be medicine for the whole world.

Siblings in Christ, these next several weeks are going to be hard--we must all call on our best skills and gifts to move through the tumult.

Your history with grief--your bodies' memories of how to cry out in order to connect, how to take care of yourself, how to release the feelings that you are holding in ways that restore balance--these are the tools and skills the country needs from us right now. Our capacity to care for each other is directly correlated to our capacity to grief.

Because grief is love that has the courage to tell the truth about itself.

(put up slide about support)

What does support look like for you in the coming weeks and what steps are you going to take to make sure you have it?

Who are two or three people you can have on call to process things with as they unfold? Reach out to them today and promise each other you'll check in regularly. How will you regulate yourself and know when you need to get grounded and find calm so that you can continue to stay engaged?

Who are the ancestors you can call on this week to tell you the truth about the healing this country needs?

Because our pain is not simply personal, it is shared--it is epochal, it is primal, it is searching for a way to be expressed and to be released.

Our democracy is stressed and strained right now. And our democracy is at a tender and tenuous juncture in its development. Fear and stress and pain and tension and grief are so raw and real right now. And there are old habits of lashing out and violence that can feel like what we need to do to make things right again--especially when those with formal power are supporting and sanctioning that violence--including the current president of the United States.

And then there's love--bidding Her time, bidding humanity to not forget Her power and Her promise. She is yearning for us to remember Her--to remember that we come from Her even as we seek Her as if She has been lost to us our whole lives.

(images of voting lines)

Video - Dancing (0:37) - (blurred out text)

In [Texas](#), [Wisconsin](#), [Tennessee](#), [Nevada](#)--all over the country--your siblings in this democracy are standing in line to vote. Some are growing weary, but they are not deterred ([kneeling picture](#)), some are dancing, and they will not let this world steal their joy ([play dancing video https://www.inquirer.com/news/philly-voters-dancing-cha-cha-slide-viral-video-klinton-cooper-20201027.html](#)), and some are calling this country to embrace a healing opportunity ([Our time is now picture](#)) that love has been yearning for, for generations.

Because these images of participation are also images of suppression--the ways our young democracy so early got tangled up with power grabs and oppression as ways to protect and defend.

And now our shared vulnerability cannot be denied. Those same muscles and impulses and synapses that help you grieve are also there to help you be brave.

Your tears have taught you that you can come out on the other side of pain, that your body knows when it needs support.

And not only can that yearning keep you going when it all feels like too much to bear, but that yearning is God's superpower alive and well in you. You were made for love--you were made for exactly what the world needs right now.

Thanks be to God.