

Many of us are coming into this All Saints Sunday carrying a variety of griefs. We grieve for so many people and things that have changed or been lost or perhaps died in the past year and a half especially. Some of us are grieving beloved people who have died, whether recently or in the past, and the people we love never truly leave us. While we can be comforted by this reality made possible by the communion of saints, it doesn't always take away the hurt of the day to day when we remember they are no longer here. Some of us are grieving what we hoped this season of life would be for us, certain visions or dreams we had that aren't able to be our current reality, often for reasons outside of our immediate control. Some of us are grieving how life has changed in the midst of the pandemic, how life changes simply because of the course of time, how life changes when certain relationships change too. We grieve friendships that are no longer strong, perhaps family connections that aren't as strong as we'd like, the loneliness that so many of us have felt in this challenging season.

I want to start today by saying your grief is valid. No one gets to say that your particular grief doesn't matter for any reason at all. There is certainly a time where we can accept the loss of something to gingerly and with strength move into whatever our next chapter holds, but there is also a time in which we need to be tenderly aware of our hearts and feelings. This tenderness makes us human. And I also want you to know that you are never alone in your grieving. Your tenderness is not a sign of weakness or shortcoming, but rather of strength. That you loved so strongly and deeply that you feel the loss acutely means you have a strong and beautiful heart. And Jesus is right here with you in that grief. Jesus, our friend and guide and Lord and Savior, is right here with us. Jesus, the beloved Son, who by God's grace and mercy came to earth to live and love among us, died for our sake, and indeed rose so that all may know of the new life made possible with God. Jesus grieves with you. Jesus weeps with you. Jesus walks with you. And Jesus loves you. Nothing will ever stop that love from being true.

If any of us needed more proof that Jesus knows what it is to be human, that Jesus walks alongside of us in our human tenderness, the story we

heard today of Lazarus and his community certainly shows us in a powerful way.

Jesus teaches us the importance of being vulnerable as a human in this story. See how the people in the community met Jesus in this story. Jesus is a well-known and largely respected teacher for many of the folks gathered there - even if some are hesitant to accept the full power and knowledge of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of God, they still know of his miraculous works. They reference an earlier healing of helping a blind man to see. So here is a respected and well known leader who appears in the midst of a chaotic scene of grief. People are distraught that Lazarus has died, he's been dead for four days. His sisters Mary and Martha are deep in grief, weeping, and asking Jesus to help and intervene.

Jesus, being the compassionate human he is, is deeply moved by the situation at hand. His spirit is disturbed for a few different reasons, and amidst his fellow people, he joins them in their weeping. This is the story from which the verse "Jesus wept" comes. And the people around him, in the midst of their respect and knowledge of him, do not judge or think less of or cast him down for his weeping and grieving. They see Jesus in his humanness, his tears and being physically and spiritually moved, and say, "see how he loved him." They see that with deep love comes deep grief when the one who we love has died. And they embrace this reality, that Jesus is one who loves deeply and grieves deeply.

When we are in grief, we can take great comfort from this reality of Jesus. Jesus grieves with us. Jesus weeps with us. Jesus loves deeply with us. Jesus is right here with us in every time and place, but especially in those places where love is tangibly felt. The places where the community comes together out of a common experience of sadness, where we truly see the humanness in one another. The places where the presence of God is felt just a little bit stronger, where the divisions between heaven and earth are just a little bit slimmer. Where we get glimpses of the deep love God has for us reflected in the love we have for our dear people.

In the midst of his grief, Jesus calls upon God his father to intervene. He begins with gratitude, a prayer of thanksgiving, that God always hears him and answers him. So God also hears us and answers us too - not always in the ways we expect, but God truly meets us where we are and gives us the promise of hope and new life. These promises are the foundation from which Jesus asks God for help and action. Jesus wants the people to see the glory of God, the new life that God has in store for us all. Jesus isn't doing this for the sake of his own self-aggrandizement or praise or anything like that. All the glory is from and goes to God, the one who makes new life possible. Jesus prays that the crowd may know he has come from God and is deeply connected to God, that those who are about to see the new life for Lazarus may believe that the life indeed comes from God.

And so, with words proclaimed in a strong, loud voice ("Lazarus! Come out!"), this beloved man indeed rose to new life, no longer dead, but indeed alive by the power of God. "Unbind him, and let him go," Jesus says. With that, Lazarus gives us hope too, that by the power of God, we may have new life too. Our new life in heaven after we die here on earth, joined together with the whole communion of saints, all of our beloved people who have gone on before us, is something to truly have hope in. As we hear in Revelation, it's in this new life of heavenly dwelling that death and pain and crying will be no more, the grieving will be no more, the tears of our eyes will be wiped away. Jesus makes all things new, in heaven and on earth, and in this promise of new life, we have hope, made new each day when we rise. God is our beginning and our end, the Alpha and Omega, the one who creates us and guides us, in this life and the next. And for these promises, for the assurance that God is with us even in our darkest, tenderest, most vulnerable times of being human, we give thanks and praise.

So dear friends, be assured that you are never truly alone in your grieving. A whole communion of saints, with whom we gather at the table and the font, is journeying with you, by the power of the Holy Spirit. A whole community of faithful people is seated around you, and praying with and for you and the changes for which you grieve. A whole trinity of God, the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, carries you and your grief, no matter how heavy, no matter how vulnerable, and continually brings promises of hope and new life to all human hearts. Thanks be to God, Amen.