

## Tears of Transformation

### Sermon for All Saints Sunday, November 7, 2021

*Readings:* Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

*Sermon text:* God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Rev. 21:3

This Sunday we are celebrating All Saints Day—which was November 1st—and all Souls Day November 2nd—liturgically “transferred” to the following Sunday. In the tradition of Mexican Christianity these, together with All Hallows Eve are *los días de los muertos*, the days of the dead (and so the *ofrenda* that our young people put up in the back is still up through today). But we are also celebrating a baptism, a day of new birth.

This is fitting. All things in creation are subject to transformation—change along a certain pattern—**life to death to new life**. So we believe as people of faith. People of Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection.

And within this broad pattern we see many smaller transformations—such as the transition from life in the watery womb to the the newborn baby’s first gulp of air. The baby cries—and the parents have tears of joy and relief.

Tears are a part of life. And I would like to invite you to spend a moment with me thinking about tears and transformation. And be forewarned, there are a lot of pop culture references to songs about tears (if you think of others let me know after the service).

Babies and young children cry a lot—from discomfort or pain, from frustration, from hunger—they don’t have other forms of expression. As the children get older they are told to use words, and stop crying when they’re not hurt. They learn that “Big Girls Don’t Cry,” (Frankie Vale and the Four Seasons) and “Boys Don’t Cry” (the Cure—not to be confused with another 80s pop band Tears for Fears). And so little children, aspiring to be big, try to stop crying. Their piercing cries of pain or frustration come down from a wail to to a heaving sob until finally reaching an exhausted end. One step in the life-long path of self-control.

Self-control is certainly a good thing to have; it is among the virtues commended by Paul (Gal 5:23). Proverbs many times warns us to curb our tongue and its propensity for gossip and rumor (see, for instance, Proverbs 12, and 15 through 18). We ought to control our appetites, lest they control us. But tears. That’s different. The psalmist tells us, we will sow with tears but reap with joy (Ps 126:5).

There are many kinds of tears. Tears of Rage (Bob Dylan, Richard Manuel of The Band)—tears that cry against injustice (Rage against the Machine). There are tears of sorrow and tears of heartbreak. And tears of compassion

Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus—and for himself in the garden before his death. Life involves pain and suffering and death is a hard parting. Grief is a cause for many tears. But so is compassion for the suffering of others—and so is happiness sometimes. Tears of joy. We often cry at happy endings—or at least I do, more as I get older. You can ask Mary, I'm sobbing like a baby at the end of Pixar movies or Saving Private Ryan, or It's a Wonderful Life.

There are fake tears, crocodile tears—false sympathy covering up our lack of concern or even schadenfreude. And there are false smiles covering up our tears (Tears of a Clown, Smokey Robinson—who also did Tracks of My Tears).

But there is a particular kind of tear I would like to bring to your attention this morning. *Tears of repentance*. The biblical Greek word translated as repentance is *metanoia*, literally transformation of mind. Metanoia comes about through a Spirit-guided self-examination of conscience and subsequent chastened insight into the truth about one's self (the eastern monastic tradition calls this state of chastened insight *penthos*). Penthos is liberating—the truth shall set you free—but both heart-breaking and heart-opening. A “broken and contrite heart God will not despise (Isaiah)unbound is what Jesus calls the well of life—as he explained to the woman at the well—whose waters are life-giving and everlasting. These are the tears of repentance—a microcosm of the waters that will flow from the throne of God and the Lamb and become the river of life in Revelation 21-22. and are considered a gift from God. Jesus calls those who mourn blessed, for they will be comforted.

Such is life. We walk in the valley of the shadow of death—but we are guided by the good shepherd to green pastures and we can lie down in green pastures. We are comforted by our faith and guided by the Holy Spirit. And in the end, when we pass on to the heavenly city, we can feast, like those in Isaiah's vision on rich food and well-aged wine.

And as Eric Clapton, broken-hearted, wrote “Beyond the door There's peace, I'm sure. And I know there'll be no more Tears in heaven.”

God, like a mother with her sobbing child, will wipe every tear from our eyes.

I love that image, God wiping away the tears of humanity in the new creation—personally being with us, wiping our wet eyes. A loving parent. It is in the vision of heaven in Isaiah 25 and in the vision of John of Patmos in the book of

Revelation, both at the end, in the reading we heard just now from the final chapter, and in chapter 7, when the angel shows the writer “a great multitude that no can count from every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne robed in white.” (Rev 7:9). Who are these? They are us, all the saints and souls. The angel says, they are the ones who come out of the great ordeal” —let’s call it the ordeal of life—and now “the one on the throne will shelter them and they will hunger no more or thirst, and the lamb of God will guide them to springs of the water of life and God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:13-17).

In Christ’s name, Amen.

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