

March 26, 2023
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Meditation: “Jesus wept”

On the news this past week I took note of a couple of the stories that were covered. There was a piece about self-harm, and a piece about emotional outbursts and violence at schools. When we lived in Strathroy, our neighbour was someone who used to self-harm. She used to cut herself, but she wasn't trying to kill herself. Actually, I think she wasn't really over it. I think she had simply moved on from directly causing her own physical pain to having someone else inflict physical pain in the form of getting a tattoo. She had many tattoos.

I looked up why people self-harm and found lots of good information from the National Health Services in the UK, the Mayo Clinic in the US, and the Canadian Mental Health Association websites. People self-harm to: as a way of having control over their body; to feel ‘real’ or feel anything as a way of coping with feelings of emptiness or numbness; to punish themselves or as way of expressing self-hatred, self-anger, or feelings of failure; as a way of coping with grief, loss, violence, or chronic illness; to make emotional pain physical pain; to deal with emotional pain or distress.

Self-harm as a way of dealing with emotional distress, and emotional outbursts and violence in our schools have emotional distress in common. I wonder about why there seems to be so much emotional distress in our society right now. I also wonder if people in our society are less emotionally mature than in the past, and why that might be. I don't have any answers right now, just questions.

People in our time are not the only ones to experience intense emotions. Jesus, on being confronted with the news of Lazarus' death, and his grieving sisters, experienced emotional distress. And he knew that Lazarus was truly dead, and not just near death, because he had been in the tomb for four days. At this point, he would have started decomposing. Lazarus' death was real. And in response, Jesus, instead of cutting or burning or biting himself, well, let me read the shortest sentence in the Bible, “Jesus wept.”

Jesus experienced the grief of the death of a good friend – someone who believed in him and what he was doing, someone who supported his ministry. And Jesus empathized with the grief that Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, were feeling. Those feelings overwhelmed him, and he wept.

And after he wept, what did Jesus do? He prayed, and he called on Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Okay, so here we are clearly in the divine side of Jesus. So, let me ask a question. “Do you think it matters that Jesus was divine, and why?”

Only a god who is more powerful than our problems is capable of saving us from those problems.

This Lent, rather than focusing on the divinity of Christ, I have focused on the humanness of Jesus. Strong emotions and weeping are human attributes. So, allow me to ask another question. “Do you think that it matters that Jesus was human, and why?” or put another way, “Why do you think it is important that Jesus was human?”

How can a god who does not understand what it is like to be human, to know hunger, thirst, betrayal, estrangement from loved ones, emotional pain, etc., how can such a god save us? Jesus' divinity makes our salvation a possibility. Jesus' humanity, his ability to empathize with the human condition is the motivation that makes the possibility a reality.

In this one story, we see both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. We see both the power to save us, and the insight into human nature necessary to understand why and from what we need saving. Thank God for sending Jesus, that God might know firsthand the physical and emotional pain humans experience.