

Helping God Cry
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

“Jesus wept.”

This summer I heard a preacher tell the story of a child running to tell her mother of a friend who was crying inconsolably because her beloved doll was broken. “What did you do?” the mother asked. “I just sat down and helped her cry,” the child said. These days, when so many of God’s children are broken, maybe we just need to sit down and help God cry. Many of us did that as we gathered in synagogues across the land on Friday night and as we gathered that same night in Widener Hall with a community of families, artists and neighbors for the opening of Souls Shot. We just sat down and helped God cry.

“Jesus wept,” is our text for All Saints’ Sunday. “Is there any place where this text does not fit?” preacher Fred Craddock once asked. “Spray paint it on the gray walls of the inner city: ‘Jesus wept.’ Scrawl it with a crayon on the hallway of an orphanage: ‘Jesus wept.’ Embroider it on every pillow in the nursing home: ‘Jesus wept.’ Nail it on posts along a refugee road... ‘Jesus wept.’ Flash it in blinking neon at the bus station where the homeless are draped over pitiless benches: ‘Jesus wept.’ Carve it over the door of a mountain cabin at which a fifteen year old girl stands with a crying child: ‘Jesus wept.’ Sky write it over every greed raped landscape: ‘Jesus wept.’ There seems no place where this text does not fit.”

Except for John’s eleventh chapter. If you know the whole story, you know that Jesus waits two days after receiving news of Lazarus’ illness before setting out with his disciples, waits two days just to make sure Lazarus will be dead. Jesus lets his friend die. It sometimes seems to us that Jesus does the same when our friends die in synagogues and on the streets of the city and in our arms. John lets us know he does this because he has one last sign to perform before he dies, a sign intended to glorify God through Lazarus’ return from the grave. Still we are inconsolable. When

he arrives in Bethany and is surrounded by the grieving family and friends, John says he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. A better translation might be, “He was angry”—not at them but at death itself.

He asks them where they have laid Lazarus. They say, “Come and see” and the words bring Jesus to tears. They are the same words *he said* to his about-to-be disciples when they asked him, “Where do you abide?”: “Come and see”; the same words *Philip said* to Nathaniel when he doubted if anything good could come out of Nazareth: “Come and see”; the same words the *Samaritan woman said* to the townspeople after he had told her everything she had ever done: “Come and see.” *Then* the words were a summons to life and light. *Now* the words are said to Jesus and summon him to darkness and death. If the translator were honest, instead of saying Jesus wept, we would read that Jesus “burst into tears.” Why? “See how he loved him!” Mary’s friends said, except they did not know *how* Jesus was about to love not only Lazarus but also the whole world.

John gives us a hint early on in his Gospel concerning the “how” of God’s love. God so loved the world, he wrote. Just as we mishear Lazarus’ friends say of Jesus’ tears, “See how *much* he loved him,” likewise John 3:16 is often paraphrased, “God loved the world so much.” But John wants us to know *how* God loved the world: God loved the world by giving his only begotten Son so that we and those we love may not perish but have everlasting life. So that love and not death will be the final word pronounced over the grave. Jesus wept because in order for Lazarus to be called out of the tomb, God’s love made flesh had to enter it.

On this All Saints’ Sunday, we call the names of those who live eternally in God’s love and who now surround us as a cloud of witnesses: witnesses who watched us sit down and help God cry on Friday night. But now it is Sunday morning, the day when love triumphed over death because God’s love made flesh entered the grave. Today these witnesses are watching and waiting

for us to get up and help God pick up the pieces: pick up the pieces of lives shattered by gun violence, of lives threatened by hatred, of lives silenced by injustice, of lives forgotten by selfish indifference and greed. No doubt God is still crying, but if we can see the world God so loved through God's tears, see God's broken children in pieces through the eyes of love, maybe, for God's sake, we will get up and give ourselves completely to love's redeeming work. Thanks be to God.