

May 15, 2022

Revelation 21:1-7

“No More Tears!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How many of you know what a lachrymatory is? It's a fancy word for a tear bottle. Tear bottles were common in ancient middle Eastern societies. They were also prevalent in the ancient Roman world, when mourners filled small glass vials or cups with tears and placed them in burial tombs as symbols of love and respect. Tear bottles reappeared during the Victorian period of the 19th century, when those mourning the loss of loved ones would collect their tears in bottles ornately decorated with silver and pewter. Special stoppers allowed the tears to evaporate. When the tears were gone, the mourning period would end. In some American Civil War stories, women were said to have cried into tear bottles and saved them until their husbands returned to show the men how much they were loved and missed. They are still used today.

It may surprise you to know that there is the mentioning of a lachrymatory in the Bible. King David writes in Psalm 56:8 "You [God] have kept count of my wanderings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" The Lutheran theologian Nikolaus Selnecker, who was one of the principle of authors of the Formula of Concord, (1532-1592) comments:

These words are full of comfort. God counts our wanderings, how often, when, from where, to where we are chased. He also counts our tears and teardrops that flow down from our cheek and collects them in his bag or pot [his bottle] and records them in his book, how many there are - he does not forget about them ... such it is that the godfearing person can take comfort and say, "Now then, God does not forget me. He counts all of my tears ... He hears me and will drive back all my enemies and adversaries ... For as often as I call on him he answers me, and I truly become aware of his being my God and gladly helping me."

The enemies that attack us and cause us to shed tears are this unbelieving world, the many temptations of Satan, our rebellion against God, and our selfishness in regard to others. These are what cause our "wanderings," as David puts it in Psalm 56. From these come our many miseries, which cause our tears. We all have miseries in varying degrees. And what we are going through today may be something different tomorrow. But even as Christians people who are invited to rejoice in Jesus and all that he gives, we still have our tears in this life.

There are the tears of physical pain. The body is falling apart and for some the pain is excruciating. Perhaps you are experiencing this now or will experience it in the near future. Outwardly we are wasting away it says in 2 Corinthians 4:16, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day in the forgiveness of sins and the hope of a new body that will dwell with Jesus in a new creation.

There are the tears of emotional pain such as despair and depression. Inwardly, we are disturbed by everything bad that happens to us. We become downcast because there does not appear to be an immediate solution that will instantaneously take our pain away. Yet, we are to remember that day by day the Lord directs his love and at night his song of forgiveness and resurrection is with us. We are to reach out to him in prayer knowing and believing that he is our help. And so we are to say as it says in Psalm 42,

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

There are the tears of anxiety. We all wrestle with a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. We just want these feelings to go away, but they stay with us. What sweet words we hear in Peter’s first epistle (5:7) where we are invited to cast our anxieties upon the Lord because he cares for us. And the apostle Paul writes: “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:5-7).”

And there are, of course, the tears of sin and death. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are a mess in our sin - unattractive and imperfect. And death is the most unnatural thing that we have to go through in this life. Our sin has brought this into the world, but the great gift is that Jesus has suffered for our sins and has died our death so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. All is not lost for us or those who have died in Christ. Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus - and we are his friends. And while we weep upon the loss of a beloved brother or sister in Christ, we do not weep as others who have no hope, for “since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. 4:14).”

There are so many more tears that we could discuss in our message for today - tears of regret, frustration, over the unbelief of a loved one, and more. These tears do not go unnoticed in the eyes of our Savior Jesus Christ. He has gathered them all. They are recorded. And most importantly he has dealt with each and every one of them at the cross and empty tomb. This is the most important thing that we do not want to miss. He took everyone of our tears at the cross so that one day he can remove them from our eyes. What Jesus endured at the cross makes it possible for John to write these words of our epistle lesson:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Those words are such a comfort. God is making all things new. The former things will be gone. The tears will be gone. We are the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven - as a beautiful bride adorned for her husband. Jesus is our husband and to him we are beautiful despite what we have become and who we are.

Joni Eareckson Tada was paralyzed in a diving accident when she was a teenager. She draws a powerful parallel between her wedding day and Christ’s love for his bride, the church. Please allow me to share with you her thoughts:

I felt awkward as my girlfriends strained to shift my paralyzed body into a cumbersome wedding gown. No amount of corseting and binding my body gave me a perfect shape. The dress just didn't fit well. Then, as I was wheeling into the church, I glanced down and noticed that I'd accidentally run over the hem of my dress, leaving a greasy tire mark. My paralyzed hands couldn't hold the bouquet of daisies that lay off-center on my lap. And my chair, though decorated for the wedding, was still a big, clunky gray machine with belts, gears, and ball bearings. I certainly didn't feel like the picture-perfect bride in a bridal magazine. I inched my chair closer to the last pew to catch a glimpse of Ken in front. There he was, standing tall and stately in his formal attire. I saw him looking for me, craning his neck to look up the aisle. My face flushed, and I suddenly couldn't wait to be with him. I had seen my beloved. The love in Ken's face had washed away all my feelings of unworthiness. I was his pure and perfect bride. How easy it is for us to think that we're utterly unlovely - especially to someone as lovely as Christ. But he loves us with the bright eyes of a Bridegroom's love and cannot wait for the day when we are united with him forever.

And that's what we are - an unattractive, frightened, paralyzed and imperfect bride - a mess, yet wild with hope, looking forward to the wedding feast of the one who has saved us, where all of our sorrow will turn into joy. We feel inadequate and unworthy - and we are - yet our eyes are fixed on Jesus. He has loved us on the cross with "the bright eyes of a Bridegroom's love" and has transformed us to be his perfect forever bride. And one day we will see him in his glory and he will remove every temporary cause of every sorrow and wipe away every tear from our eyes. **No More Tears. No More Tears.**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott