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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
4/6/2012, Good Friday  
St. John 19:25-27

*In Nomine Iesu Christi!*

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother ... When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “woman, behold your son.” then he said to the disciple, “behold, your mother!”

For Christ, death was drawing near! But, though abandoned by all but one of His disciples, our dying Savior did not die alone. Standing beneath the cross were two people who were especially dear to the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. We are familiar with the love and affection that Christ had for His mother, and His great love for John is clear from the Gospels. In the hour of His agony, they responded with loving faithfulness!

The text invites us to go by faith to Golgotha and to stand beside this man of grief and this Mother of sorrows. Love compelled them to go to the cross, and love compels us as well, though it is a scene of inhuman cruelty! We have come to know this hour and all that preceded it very well. The trials and the rude taunting of the soldiers, the flogging, the torturous way of sorrows out to Calvary, the nailing of three bodies to their crosses, the heartless words of the crowd, the offering of sour wine, the final words of our Lord. Yes, we know the events of God’s Friday very well! But what did our companions, John and Mary, do while standing there beneath the cross? Scripture gives us none of their words, but surely one thing is clear. Mary and John stood there remembering and weeping.

The hardest of hearts would find it impossible to remain unmoved and tearless at such a scene. But here we have two of the most tender of hearts. Mary, the virgin Mother whose heart had always been filled with love and concern for her Son could hardly abandon Him at the last. John, so loved by his Divine Master, loved Him in return and could not leave when the other terrified disciples scampered away. There they stood and all they could do was remember and weep!

What was the cause of their weeping? For Mary the prophecy of aged Simeon was coming to pass; a sword was piercing her soul. Like any mother would, she remembered! And what a memory she had of her Son. The annunciation by the

Archangel Gabriel, and the birth in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt and the return to Nazareth, her Son's first Passover celebration and his remarkable conversation with the great teachers of Israel, His loving obedience and His work with Joseph, His departure from home and the years of His ministry. She saw little of Him in those three years, but she heard a great deal about His words and His works. His life was clearly the life of the Promised One. But now all of her hopes and fears came to a climax. Her Son who was the Son of the most High was at the point of death. No child should precede his mother in death, much less a child of such love and promise. She wept the tears of all mothers since Eve. The lot of mothers is, "to carry, to bear, to watch and to lose." Mary was losing her Son in the most painful way. He was being crucified like the common criminals who were at His right hand and His left. She could not fully grasp the divine plan behind that death. She wept the tears of a loving mother bereft of her only Son.

The beloved disciple John must also have wept tears at the impending loss of a Teacher, Lord and Friend. What memories he had as he stood there! The divine summons to follow Jesus and his departure from his past peaceful life, the endless walks through the holy land as Christ carried on His ministry, the teachings that he did not always understand, the miracles, the hospitality he shared in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, the disputes with the leaders of the Jews, the miracles of feeding and healing, the raising of the dead, the glorious Transfiguration, Christ's prophecy of His coming death, the final Passover meal and the mysterious words of Christ spoken over the Passover bread and cup, "Take eat, this is my Body... Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament in my Blood." Finally his mind focused on the trials and sentence of death. His memories were bitter-sweet, and surely this was not the end that he hoped and looked for when he followed the Lord Jesus. Like Mary, he wept tears of loss and crushed dreams.

As we stand beside these two saints, seeing the agony and the approaching death of our Divine Redeemer, we too are moved to tears. Our tears are different from those of Mary and John. We have come to believe and know the mystery of God's plan of salvation. We see Christ Jesus on the cross not as a victim, but as our King whose death was the final triumphant defeat of sin and death and Satan. Yes, there is agony! Yes, there is inhuman cruelty! Yes, it seems that death is victor. But we know better. In the cross of Christ there is true glory. He was glorified in His crucifixion because through it He brought eternal life to all people.

Like Mary and John our emotions are aroused and our tears flow, but for different reasons. We are neither bereft nor disappointed. The death of the

Lamb of God is life for us. Then, how is it that we are moved to tears? As we look at the God-Man on the cross we think not just of forgiveness and life. We remember that those who believe have put on Christ, those who believe are other Christs in this world, those who believe have a common destiny. In the final analysis, Christ Jesus suffered and died that we might be like Him!

We look at the Divine Redeemer whose infinite love for us moved Him to empty Himself of the divine glory that was His from eternity and to suffer death on the cross that we might share with Him an eternal and blessed life in heaven as children of the heavenly Father. If we are completely honest with ourselves we can reach only one conclusion. Our Good Friday tears flow because, despite all that He has done, we are really not very much like Him: Think of our daily lives and words and activities! As we look at ourselves and as others look at us, who would say, "There is one of God's saints: there goes another Christ"?

Because we see His love and sacrifice, and because we are not really like Him, tears must well up and flow from our eyes and hearts and souls. Our tears flow and rightly so, yet we do not despair;

The power of God's Spirit is still among us! What He has accomplished in others, He can accomplish also in us. Yes, we can dry our tears when we remember that God continues to forgive those who are penitent. Believe that God for Christ's sake forgives, resolve with the help of the Holy Spirit to amend your life, and forgiveness is yours. Shed no tears of guilt! Guilt should play no role in your life, for God has forgiven you.

Let us shed no tears of remorse over past failings! God has given us the means of grace! We are baptized! By the power of that blessed water we have been reborn children of God. No power can change this as long as we believe. We have the Word, the creating, encouraging, life-giving Word of God. Hear and follow it, and we will become more Christ-like. We have the Holy Eucharist! In this Most Holy Sacrament we eat and drink the true and substantial Body and Blood of Christ. It is an eating and drinking that can nourish us and enable us to become other Christs! It is a Sacrament which is also our corporate sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in which we offer ourselves to God who has offered His Son for us. In this Eucharistic sacrifice we are more and more united with Him to whom we offer ourselves.

On this Good Friday we can indeed wipe away the tears of our eyes and souls. Whatever may lie in our past, God has given us the means to become more and more like Christ. Let us resolve to use these means in the coming days and

years. Then we will find the joy of realizing that Christ's purpose in suffering and dying is being fulfilled in us. We are becoming more and more like Him. Amen!