

1 Sermon, October 3, 2010

Texts: Luke 23:26-31, Psalm 27:1-14

Title: "Honoring the Sadness and Joy in You"

1. Psalm – a mix
2. What are the benefits of sadness?
 - a. appreciation
 - b. empathy
 - c. access to beauty
 - d. something to hope for
 - e. time to work through things
3. What are the drawbacks of joy?
4. Jesus himself appeared to give in to despair

1. Psalm – a mix

If you read Psalm 27 out loud, you notice something. There are sudden changes of mood. It starts out with confidence and trust, and then moves to uncertainty, helplessness, longing and back to trust again.

I'd like to share with you the last six verses, which give a sense of the tension in the Psalm.

8My heart tells me to pray. I am eager to see your face,

9so don't hide from me.

I am your servant, and you have helped me.

Don't turn from me in anger. You alone keep me safe.

Don't reject or desert me.

10Even if my father and mother should desert me,
you will take care of me.

11Teach me to follow, LORD,
and lead me on the right path because of my enemies.

12Don't let them do to me what they want.

People tell lies about me and make terrible threats,

13but I know I will live to see how kind you are.

14Trust the LORD!

Be brave and strong and trust the LORD.

Psalm 27 is a very real psalm. It reflects a faith journey much like yours or mine, where things don't go smoothly. Where, at times, we are under attack, or our values seem under attack, where we feel threatened.

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The Psalm reminds us how in our faith we *intend* to trust in God, but reserve a part of ourselves that is not quite sure; that is testing the waters.

Our faith, even with the best intentions, has holes in it. Our faith leaks, and can get deflated sometimes.

As author Bill Long has written, the Psalms take us through themes of longing, distress, trust and praise; all of them rhythms of the spiritual life which need to be recaptured in our day.

Two of the emotions expressed in the Psalms are sadness and joy. Today I want to explore with you the relationship between sadness and joy, and their part in our spiritual lives.

In fact, sadness and joy have part in our worship, where we confess to God our sin, and we praise God, too.

2. What are the benefits of sadness?

Many of us try to avoid sadness. It's a cultural thing that in twenty-first century America, we try to put on a happy face and avoid sadness.

But our sadness has more to *teach* us than our joy.

Our sadness is also often more real than our joy. The Psalm teaches us that even the best of us will be misconstrued, misunderstood, opposed, and blamed at times. The cross is evidence that, even if you're faithful, it isn't all a flower garden.

All sadness is not depression. Sadness often has something to teach us. So here's a short list:

α. appreciation

First, *appreciation*: our sadness gives us time to really appreciate what is good. When we're sad, we're naturally more thoughtful. We can, in the midst of sadness, thank God for the blessings we do enjoy.

If absence makes the heart grow fonder, sadness helps us realize how important relationships are.

Have you ever been sad and really missed and appreciated someone in a way you hadn't before?

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b. empathy

Second, empathy:

Sadness allows us to put ourselves into another's shoes.

Psalm 58 talks about God putting our tears in a bottle. God treasures our sadness!

If God feels for us and appreciates our tears, we can appreciate the tears of others.

When I am sad, my heart goes out to others; I want to do something to make a difference. That's a holy impulse: to bind up the wounded, to dry the tears of the weeping.

c. access to beauty

Third, beauty:

Sadness and beauty have always been companions, in whatever time, culture or place. The oldest love songs and poetry around the world speak of the pain of separation from a loved one, or the sorrow of unrequited love.

Shakespeare, in *Romeo and Juliet*, had Romeo say: "Good night, good night! parting is such sweet sorrow, / That I shall say good night till it be morrow"

Sorrow can be sweet, because we see the beauty in the simple things.

Austin Warren, a famous professor of English literature, said: "Leave happiness to the animals. If a poet gets too happy, his poetry won't be any good."

d. something to hope for

Fourth, something to hope for:

Sadness is a state we find ourselves in when the real just doesn't match up to the ideal. So we are dealing with a less-than-perfect reality, and hoping for something better.

Our sadness gives us something to hope for. It accepts the reality of what now is, all the while longing for something better.

e. time to work thru things

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Fifth, sadness gives us time. When we're sad, we're not running around trying to do stuff, so we slow down. We think more. We ponder more. We put things into perspective. We re-order our priorities.

Sadness can really help us in many ways.

3. What are the drawbacks of joy?

Likewise, joy can have some drawbacks. Joy is a wonderful thing, but if ignorance is bliss, bliss can also mean ignorance. When we're joyful and all is right with the world, we may miss a lot that goes on around us.

When we're joyful, we can get kind of caught up in ourselves, and just not be very realistic.

The pursuit of happiness at all costs can even make us willfully blind.

A few years ago, the priest at a North Carolina Catholic church placed his usual array of Lenten crosses, draped all in black for Good Friday, out in front of his little church. Soon Father Ed received a call from the North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce: "Look preacher, we've been getting complaints about those crosses out in your churchyard. Now inside the church, who cares? But out front, where everybody can see them, they are offensive. The retired people here don't like them -- find them depressing. The tourists will not like it either. It will be bad for business. People come down here to get happy, not depressed."

4. Jesus himself appeared to give in to despair

You'll notice that the central Christian symbol is not a smiley face, but a cross.

And Jesus, in his teaching, talked about making serious choices: the first would be last, blessed are the poor in spirit, take up your cross, count the cost, go the narrow way.

Jesus didn't sugar-coat things.

Our faith has as much sadness as joy. The Christian faith is a very realistic faith.

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That's why, when I read today's passage about Jesus, on his way to the cross, I reflect that Jesus was warning the women for good reason. He spoke to them in bold and depressing terms:

Someday people will say, "Women who never had children are really fortunate!" At that time everyone will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" They will say to the hills, "Hide us!"

The despair that Jesus felt was very real. And it is a comfort to me to know that Jesus himself suffered deep sadness and even despair. It means that my sadness is not so out of place.

But we need to balance that with joy. Sadness is part of the journey, but the story never ends there. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness ended in his ministry. The story of the crucifixion ends in resurrection. The vision of revelation ends with a new heaven and a new earth full of peace and beauty.

I will learn from the sadness. I will not dismiss it. But I know that joy is coming, because that's how God's story always ends. Amen.

Luke 23:26-31 (Contemporary English Version)

(Matthew 27.31-44; Mark 15.21-32; John 19.17-27)

26As Jesus was being led away, some soldiers grabbed hold of a man from Cyrene named Simon. He was coming in from the fields, but they put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

27A large crowd was following Jesus, and in the crowd a lot of women were crying and weeping for him. 28Jesus turned to the women and said:

Women of Jerusalem, don't cry for me! Cry for yourselves and for your children. 29Someday people will say, "Women who never had children are really fortunate!" 30At that time everyone will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" They will say to the hills, "Hide us!" 31If this can happen when the wood is green, what do you think will happen when it is dry?

Luke 23:26-31 (The Message)

26-31As they led him off, they made Simon, a man from Cyrene who happened to be coming in from the countryside, carry the cross behind Jesus. A huge crowd of people followed, along with women weeping and carrying on. At one point Jesus turned to the women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. The time is coming when

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they'll say, 'Lucky the women who never conceived! Lucky the wombs that never gave birth! Lucky the breasts that never gave milk! Then they'll start calling to the mountains, 'Fall down on us!' calling to the hills, 'Cover us up!' If people do these things to a live, green tree, can you imagine what they'll do with deadwood?"

Psalm 27:1-14 (Contemporary English Version)

(By David.)

A Prayer of Praise

1You, LORD, are the light that keeps me safe.

I am not afraid of anyone.

You protect me, and I have no fears.

2Brutal people may attack and try to kill me,
but they will stumble.

Fierce enemies may attack,
but they will fall.

3Armies may surround me, but I won't be afraid;
war may break out, but I will trust you.

4I ask only one thing, LORD:

Let me live in your house
every day of my life
to see how wonderful you are
and to pray in your temple.

5In times of trouble, you will protect me.
You will hide me in your tent and keep me safe
on top of a mighty rock.

6You will let me defeat all of my enemies.
Then I will celebrate, as I enter your tent
with animal sacrifices and songs of praise.

7Please listen when I pray!
Have pity. Answer my prayer.

8My heart tells me to pray.

I am eager to see your face,

9so don't hide from me.

I am your servant, and you have helped me.

Don't turn from me in anger.

You alone keep me safe.

Don't reject or desert me.

10Even if my father and mother should desert me,
you will take care of me.

11Teach me to follow, LORD,
and lead me on the right path because of my enemies.

12Don't let them do to me what they want.

People tell lies about me and make terrible threats,

13but I know I will live to see how kind you are.

14Trust the LORD!

Be brave and strong and trust the LORD.

Psalm 27:1-14 (New International Version)

Psalm 27

Of David.

- 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evil men advance against me
to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
- 3 Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then will I be confident.
- 4 One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.
- 5 For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.
- 6 Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.
- 7 Hear my voice when I call, O LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.
- 8 My heart says of you, "Seek his ^[b] face!"
Your face, LORD, I will seek.
- 9 Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Savior.
- 10 Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.
- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.
- 12 Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
breathing out violence.
- 13 I am still confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

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14 Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.