"Jesus Began to Weep" November 1, 2026
John 11:1-6, 17-44 Westminster, Greenville
All Saints' Sunday Ben Dorr
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When I was growing up, one of the tv shows that my parents enjoyed watching was the sitcom, MASH. There's an episode in season four, circa 1975, in which a wounded bombardier is brought into the hospital tent. Radar checks him in and asks his name.

The pilot responds by saying "My name is Jesus Christ."
The pilot isn't joking.
He really believes that he's Jesus.
But of course, not everyone agrees!

Major Burns and Major Houlihan think he's faking a brain injury in order to avoid duty. But Colonel Potter isn't so sure, and he brings in a psychiatrist, Dr. Sidney Freedman.

Dr. Freedman asks: You're not a bombardier?
The patient replies: I'm Christ, the Lord.
Dr. Freedman asks: What are you doing here, in an army hospital?
The patient replies: I'm Christ. Where should I be?

Dr. Freedman asks about the patient's role as a pilot, bombing the enemy. The patient denies that it was him.

"They're my children. Why would I hurt my children?"
And a moment later, there are tears in the patient's eyes.[1]

The ambiguity of the scene is rich.

[1] A transcript of this scene can be found at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0638393/quotes/. I am indebted to a sermon by the Rev. Kristy Farber, "Every Other Year," preached at Mercer Island Presbyterian Church and found in Journal for Preachers, Advent, 2026, for calling my attention to this episode of M.A.S.H.

Are they fake tears, because the patient really is trying to fool everyone? Or are they the tears of an injured soldier, traumatized and wounded and confused?

Or are they the actual tears of Jesus, showing up in that soldier, grieving over the death and destruction of war?

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Those tears, the tears of that soldier—
they are not too far from our text for today.

Let me talk to our teenagers for a second. Teenagers in this room…if your parents ever ask you to memorize a verse from scripture, just one verse that you will know by heart, I've got just the verse for you.

It's John 11:35.
"Jesus wept."

It's the shortest verse in the entire Bible.
Of course, that's the King James version of it.
You heard it this morning as "Jesus began to weep."

But either way, my question for all of you, right now…is why?
Why, in this story, does Jesus weep?

Because just like that old episode from MASH, these are highly ambiguous tears in our text.

For example, in verse 4, John tells us that when Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was sick, how does Jesus respond?

He says: “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

There are no tears when Jesus first hears about Lazarus.
No sense of emergency, moving quickly to get to Lazarus.

In fact, John says that because Jesus knows what’s going to happen, “…he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”

If Jesus knew what was going to happen all along,
knew that he would raise Lazarus from the dead all along,
why, when he arrives at Bethany, does Jesus weep?

Our Thursday morning Bible study had some good ideas for why Jesus wept. One person suggested that it was the lack of faith that others had in Jesus and what he could do—because of their inability to comprehend the love of God at work in Jesus…Jesus wept.

That could be it.

Another suggested that when Jesus saw everyone else crying, he empathized with their sorrow, and their grief became his grief, and their sadness became his sadness…

John even writes:
“When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the [others] who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”

Maybe that’s why Jesus wept.
Or maybe it’s something else.

Let’s take a closer look at what triggers the tears.
Jesus asks, “Where have you laid him?”
The response is: “Lord, come and see.”

And it's at THAT MOMENT that Jesus weeps.
When he hears the words, "Come and see"…

Come and see.

Did you know that we've heard these words in John's Gospel before?

Back in chapter one, when Andrew and Simon [Peter] start to follow Jesus, they say, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"—
and Jesus replies, "Come and see."

When Philip tells Nathaniel about Jesus in chapter one, and Nathaniel says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"—

Philip replies, "Come and see."

Come and see is kind of like "Follow me."
It's an invitation to discipleship in the Gospel of John.

These three words show up again in chapter four, with the woman at the well, when—after her encounter with Jesus—she runs back home and says to the people of her town, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!"

Come and see…

They aren't simply words of curiosity.
They are words of CALL.

So getting back to our text for today, Jesus does not speak these words…he hears them from someone else.

"Where have you laid him?"

"Lord, come and see."
And at that moment, Jesus weeps.

What is Jesus being called to do?

Not only bring his friend Lazarus OUT of the tomb, raising his friend from the dead. He's being called ***to enter his own tomb***.

To go to the cross, and be "obedient, even unto death…"
Maybe THAT'S why Jesus weeps.

You see, if we were to keep reading in chapter 11, in verse 53 we would learn that the raising of Lazarus is THE event that prompted the religious authorities in John's Gospel to decide to put Jesus to death.

I suspect that when he heard the call to "Come and see," Jesus knew all this…knew that by raising Lazarus from the dead, he would set off a series of events that would lead to his own death…and this is what prompted the tears.

Because there was surely a part of Jesus that didn't want to die.
A part that wanted to keep healing and teaching and forgiving.
A part that wanted to keep living.

Now…John never says why Jesus wept.
But I'm so glad he included it in today's story.

Not because it's the easiest verse to memorize.
But because I believe that those tears represent one of the most important moments in our Savior's life.

Not a confident, "in control" kind of Jesus.
But a vulnerable Jesus.
A Messiah who knows what it's like,
along the road of faith,

to grieve, to be overcome,
to feel overwhelmed.

You see, when Jesus calls us, saying to each of us "come and see," he's not asking us to perform miracles like him.

He's asking us to be vulnerable like him.

To be vulnerable with our love and our lives and the grace that we show others…just like him.

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The editor of *Plough* magazine, Peter Mommsen, recently wrote about that vulnerable grace. It showed up in a friendship that changed his life.

It wasn't a friend of his, at least, not directly.
The friend was someone his father came to know.
A Vietnam veteran named Lee.

"Lee…first showed up at our house unannounced in February 1990," writes Mommsen. "He was a forty-year-old carpenter we'd never met before, with a mustache, ponytail, and ancient Dodge van. He asked to talk to the father of Dorothy, my ten-year-old sister."

Well, Peter and Dorothy's father wasn't home, so Lee left. And when Peter's father returned and heard that a stranger was asking about his daughter, well—what do you think he did?

He went out to try and find this stranger.
And he did just that.
As he was driving, he saw Lee walking on the highway.
He offered him a ride, and during the drive, learned what was going on.

Lee, it turned out, had just been released after spending a year in the county jail. And Lee had come by the house to thank 10-year-old Dorothy for saving his life.

Because the previous Christmas, while he was in prison, Lee had been on suicide watch. And the church that the Mommsen family was a part of—they sent holiday cookie boxes to the inmates.

The box that Lee received had a card that read:
"Dear Friend, here is a Christmas greeting for you.
I hope you have a nice Christmas. Love from Dorothy."

"Lee always said afterward that card made him believe in angels," Peter Mommsen writes.

But more importantly, it told Lee, on Christmas Eve:
"Somebody in this world still cares for me."

Well, Lee and Peter's dad decided to stay in touch.
And over time, they became friends.
Even though, at least at first blush, they had very little in common.

Mommsen's father loved literature, classical music and Bob Dylan.
Lee liked Led Zeppelin and the Doors.

As a college student, Mommsen's father had written a defense of pacifism during the Vietnam War.

Lee, of course, had served in Vietnam.
He never went to college.

By the time he met the Mommsen family, he had lost his own family, as well as his savings, and even most of his teeth.

But the friendship persisted, and then it grew.

Lee came to school concerts for Peter Mommsen and his siblings, and over time, Lee grudgingly learned to appreciate Beethoven. On the flip side, Peter Mommsen's father, much to his astonishment, got into stock car racing because of his friendship with Lee.

It wasn't all smooth sailing.
There were times when the two argued.
But in the end, the underlying loyalty and friendship won out.

Sixteen years after he had first appeared at the Mommsen family's door, Lee died suddenly of a stroke.

And Peter Mommsen writes:

"The Saturday before, he and my dad had met up as usual. Lee had never been one for shows of affection…[but] this time he took my dad's hand and [for inexplicable reasons] wouldn't let go."

Almost like he knew, somehow, that he didn't have much time left.

"My life has been useless," he said to Peter's dad, "but the time I've known you has been the best time of my life."

Of course, Lee had the first part of that statement all wrong.
His life had <u>not</u> been useless.

Much to the Mommsen family's surprise, hundreds of people showed up for Lee's funeral—not only from their church, but also from the neighborhood.

It turned out that Lee had a gift for friendship.

For noticing people, looking out for other people.

"…on his scant income" Peter Mommsen writes, Lee "had been leading a secret life as a philanthropist to others in the neighborhood…"

Giving $100 tips to overworked waitresses at the local diner. Being generous and gracious to so many neighbors "who, like him, struggled to get by."[2]

And it all began with a note.
A note that told Lee…someone out there was paying attention to him, even in his darkest hour.

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It was the French philosopher and mystic, Simone Weil, who said:

"Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."[3]

Which is an especially good reminder on All Saints' Sunday.

In just a moment, you're going to be invited to remember some of the saints in your life.

You'll write their names on a card that looks like this.
People who have paid attention to you.

Who have been generous with you.
Who have taught you what grace and courage and faith are all about.

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[2] Peter Mommsen, "A Friend for Life," *Plough*, September 7, 2026.
[3] I first heard this on The Atlantic's podcast The Permanent Questions, in an interview that David Brooks conducted with Meghan Sullivan, "What Is the Good Life?" September 13, 2026.

As the Presbyterian professor and pastor, Tom Long, puts it:

"The communion of the saints is the confident affirmation…that the dead in Christ have crossed…from historical time to [God's time]…and yet we [know that we] belong still to the same community, which belongs to God in Christ…

And we also know this:
"…[their] death changes, but [does] not destroy, our relationship to [them]. We stand on a great continuum of worship with the saints who have gone before us."[4]

Putting their names on that card is a sign of that continuum.

So take that card with you when you leave here today.
But not just when you leave this sanctuary.
Take it with you when you leave this life.

Because all of us are going to meet Jesus one day,
and if you have that card with you when you meet him,
he just might ask you what you have in your hand.

And you'll tell him it's just a card with some names.

Names of people who, if it weren't for them,
if it weren't for their love and their grace,
you don't know how you would have made it
through your life.

And maybe he'll ask to see it.
And you'll show it to him.

And Jesus will say:

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[4] Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

"I know these people. I know them all. In fact, I passed by some of them on my way here, and they're really looking forward to seeing you again."[5]

And maybe you'll ask Jesus where you can find them.
And you know what he'll say?

You know what he'll say.

"Come and see…"

Amen.

[5] I am indebted to Dr. Fred Craddock for this image, which I've modified slightly, and comes from Dr. Craddock's collection of stories in *Craddock Stories*, edited by Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, St. Louise, MO: Chalise Press, 2001.