

## **LIFE OVEN WITH JESUS: Emotional**

I have a very simple word for you today, and it has its roots in a story in John 11 about a man named Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead.

You likely know the story. Jesus learns that his friend is critically ill. He delays going to see him so that God's glory can be made obvious. Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, each wonder whether Lazarus would have died had Jesus arrived on site sooner.

But the moment in the story to which I call our attention occurs well into the story, in v.35 of a 44 verse story. You know the verse - the shortest verse in the Bible .... We wouldn't even put the verse on the screen were in not for v.36 of John 11, which adds some texture to Jesus' tears ....

What do we learn from those two verses? We learn that Jesus loved his friend Lazarus. More broadly, we learn that Jesus loved. He didn't just love God or himself. He loved people, including his friends. We ALSO learn that Jesus had emotions.

He's the son of God, so we might think the guy always kept it together, was cool under pressure, took the long view of stressful situations, and had so much faith in God that he never worried, never fretted, never cried. But that's not the view of Jesus we get from the Gospels. John 11 is a great example. In response to his friend's death he cried. Jesus knew all about eternal life. But he cried. Jesus knew God never lets us go. But he cried. Jesus knew death is not an end; it's an entry to eternal life. And yet he cried when he learned that his friend had entered that life.

And tears aren't the only emotion Jesus felt. Think about Jesus overturning the tables in the temple, where people were selling things and making the worship space more like a bazaar than a house of worship. Think of the fury that must have fueled Jesus' actions.

In John 12, Jesus is thinking about the fate that awaits him when he says (27)... my soul is deeply troubled. Think about that - unrest, turmoil, stress, worry.

Or this from Matthew 26, when Jesus is about to go off by himself into the garden at Gethsemane. He says this to the disciples who have accompanied him.... (38) Hear the emotion? His soul is crushed with grief. Stress. Worry. Fear. Dread.

Or in the way Luke describes the same scene (22.44) we find a graphic depiction of those emotions' physical toll on Jesus ...

I remind us of those familiar Gospel scenes to make the very simple point that Jesus experienced and expressed emotions. And if he did, you and I can, too. He felt sad. He felt glad. He felt angry. He felt alone. He felt betrayed. He felt connected. Jesus felt.

He was holy. He was God's chosen one. He was a cut above the rest of us! But he was not immune to emotions. Neither are we.

In the church I served while in seminary in Kentucky, one of the first pastoral situations I encountered, as a 25 year old kid, was a woman in her late 70's whose husband had died five years earlier. She lived in a house in which she kept her drapes closed - and they weren't the see through kind of drapes. They were the room darkening kind of drapes. She had lived in that state physically and emotionally for many painful years after Johnnie died. Fortunately, I learned really quickly in seminary that emotions were okay - that it's okay to feel sad, to feel lonely, to feel whatever you feel - within reason, of course. So I didn't try to fix the woman I'm telling you about. We talked. Well, she talked. And cried. A lot. But within a year or two, her spirit brightened, she opened her drapes to let in some daylight. She lived the rest of her life with a different set of emotions.

If I did ANY thing good for that dear lady, whose name was Margret, I let her have her emotions. I didn't try to short circuit the impact of her husband's death. And God worked a mighty renewal in her life.

One of the most useful and necessary principles of caring for people is simply to let people feel whatever. It might not be rational. Might not be helpful. Might not be good for the person long term, but if someone says I'm feeling down, the best first step - for pastors and laypeople - I'm sorry. Tell me about it.

There are lots of powerful emotions, of course. Sadness and grief. Loneliness. Anger.

Anger's a powerful emotion. Probably the best known Bible verse about anger is Ephesians 4.26-27 ..... Notice, those verses don't say, don't get angry. Those verses say corral your anger. Don't go to sleep angry is another way of saying, you control your anger, don't let your anger control you.

Jesus' righteous rage at the Pharisees, which we see him display on multiple occasions in the Gospels is great evidence that anger is not the problem. Unmanaged, unrighteous anger is. Anger expressed in acts physical violence is. Anger expressed in verbal abuse of people is. But the anger, the emotion, is not the problem. Grief is not a problem. Sometimes people will say, I just feel so bad for him - I wish there was something I could do to cheer her up! Meaning, I wish there was something I could do to take away what the person's feeling. Nice thought, I suppose, but it's the wrong strategy. Emotions are okay. In general, let people feel, let yourself feel, what you're feeling. But know that the emotions of the moment are not necessarily the last word.

I told you I had a simple message for you today. I guess it's simple to say, but not so simple to implement. Life is complicated. We human beings are complicated. At any given moment, we can be awash in reactions to our surroundings, reactions we call emotions. If you're having a great day, feel the joy, and make sure you praise God! But also realize the joy of the moment probably won't last. You can bet other emotions are on the way. And if you're having a terrible day, confess the burden - that's okay too. But also realize the weight of the moment won't last. The last half of Ps 30.5 says "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning."

As you struggle with the burdens of your life, be sure you cry out to Jesus, who knew every emotion on earth, and is ready to accompany you through any emotion in your life.