

## Grieving with Hope

### John 11

One of the most helpful articles I've read over the past several weeks came from, of all places, the Harvard Business Review. It was an interview entitled "That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief." The author interviewed is David Kressler, who has written a number of books on grief, including one with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who is famous for the five stages of grief in her book *On Death and Dying*. The interview talks about how we're all grieving the loss of a lot of things from these last few weeks. We're feeling collective grief, as we all mourn the loss of so many things we used to be able to do together. We're feeling anticipatory grief, preemptively grieving the loss of things that may not come back in the new normal. We've gone through the five stages of grief: we've denied there's a problem, we've gotten angry at all the changes, we've bargained about how to move on, we've been sad about what we've lost. Hopefully we'll come to accept what's happened, focusing on what we can do – wash our hands and stay home as much as possible. Until then, though, and even after we reach that state, we'll keep going through the stages of grief.

We're grieving the end of things. College students are grieving the end of their time with friends, the end of many clubs and activities, the end of the social events planned for this last half of the semester. Others are grieving that a wedding wasn't how it was supposed to be. Others are grieving that even their grieving has to change, as even funerals are subject to the limit of 10 people gathered together.

Perhaps one of the things we're grieving the most is the end of our invincibility. Most of the time when we hear about diseases like this virus, they are far from our lives. We haven't had to worry about an Ebola outbreak in this country, aside from its use in movies or TV shows. Previous pandemics that began in China never seemed to spread this far. Yet here we are.

Some are grieving the loss of their job, or at least the loss of some income. Some are grieving the loss of their retirement funds, knowing they will have to work longer now. Others are grieving that the vacation they'd long planned won't happen or failed to happen. Still others are grieving the loss of sports, the loss of a final chance to compete and win.

Among the many details we can pull out of this long reading on the raising of Lazarus, one that comes out is that Jesus grieves. "Jesus wept" is the shortest verse in most English translations of the Bible. In two short words, we see how Jesus experienced the same thing we do. Through the Gospel of John, Jesus often seems to be larger than life, always in control. Yet here we see Jesus weeping, Jesus grieving, over the death of his friend Lazarus and the sadness that Mary and Martha and others are feeling.

Jesus weeps even though he knows what's going to happen. Jesus weeps even though he knows he is going to call Lazarus out of the tomb. Jesus weeps even though he knows that a somber funeral feast will become a celebration of restored life.

But Jesus doesn't stay in his grief. He is the resurrection and the life. He moves away from his grief to doing what he came to do. Jesus stands in front of the tomb of Lazarus, and commands the stone to be rolled away, over Martha's objections. And once that is done, Jesus shouts into the tomb, "Lazarus, come out!" And, still wrapped in his grave clothes, he does. Lazarus had been raised from the dead! His funeral had been ruined, and a gathering of sorrow had been turned into a gathering of joy. The grieving was turned into dancing, at least for now.

But that wasn't the end of the story. Jesus knew that he couldn't keep traveling around, ruining funerals and comforting the grieving one by one. Death needed to be defeated once and for all. And so, Jesus went to the cross, went to his own funeral. He too would be taken out of town to be buried. His friends, too, would grieve his death. The story continued to another tomb that also had weeping women, a days-old body, and a stone to roll away. And that story also seemed like it had ended, on the cross. But this other tomb would not be used again. This other tomb would be an end, the end of the reign of death. It would show Jesus as the resurrection and the life, and serve to confirm the promise that one day all grieving will end.

The author of the article I cited at the beginning of the sermon added another stage to the stages of grief,

because he felt he needed something more than ending at acceptance. The sixth stage he added was meaning. Grieving does point us to finding meaning. We grieve because the world is still broken by sin. We grieve because things are not the way they are supposed to be. We grieve because we lose things, events, people who are dear to us.

But we also look to Jesus for the meaning beyond the grieving. As much as Lazarus is the reason for the story, he's not the focus. Jesus is. John keeps our eyes on Jesus as the resurrection and the life. That's the meaning we find. We know that death does not have the final word. We know that death, however it comes, cannot separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Christ's resurrection is the key to our own present hope and future glory.

We face a lot of fear. Especially we fear death. Death is unnatural, after all. It's a result of sin. And with all of the medical advances, we don't often have to think about death. Our lives can be extended in almost miraculous ways. But while we may fear death, we need to also remember that God has overcome death, for we worship a resurrected Lord! Jesus endured the full horror of death and was raised victoriously to show God's faithfulness through it all.

When we know that we look forward to the resurrection. That's why we care for bodies now. God cares about physical things, even once sin and death are defeated once and for all. It's why we care for our neighbors by practicing social distancing, keeping them safe and limiting who we could spread the virus to. It's why we care for our neighbors physical needs during this time, keeping food banks stocked and donating blood.

We have the sure and certain hope that death has been defeated because Jesus proved it by his own resurrection. God's faithfulness in raising Jesus Christ from the dead is the one basis on which our hope for resurrection and eternal life rests. That gives our lives meaning no matter what else is happening in the world. Thanks be to God for that.

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