

Something Touched Me Deep Inside ... the Day the Music Died
Sunday, August 29, 2021, 11:15 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

*A long, long time ago
 I can still remember how that music used to make me smile
 And I knew if I had my chance.
 That I could make those people dance
 And maybe they'd be happy for awhile
 But February made me shiver
 With every paper I'd deliver
 Bad news on the doorstep
 I couldn't take one more step
 I can't remember if I cried when I read about his widowed bride
 But something touched me deep inside
 The day the music died.*

*So bye, bye, Miss American Pie
 Drove my Chevy to the levy but the levy was dry
 And them good ole' boys were drinking whiskey and rye
 Singing "This'll be the day that I die."*

In the name of the three that I admire most: The Creator, The Christ and the Holy Ghost – Amen.

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I'm not crying ... you're crying.

One of the common strands that binds White America together – particularly White Male America -- is that we are absolutely awful at crying. I don't know why that is, but it is. It may not be exclusively a white thing, but it is definitively a White thing. We are socialized that way. It is part of this culture that imprisons us.

I felt it this week. I was dropping my youngest son off at college and for the whole trip, instead of letting tears flow, I would fight them back. And I know better. I mean I literally preach about this stuff, right?

It's interesting that the two shortest verses in the Bible are "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) and "Rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16) ... because our ability to deeply rejoice is inextricably bound to our ability to weep.

When John's Gospel tells us "Jesus wept," White America gets uncomfortable because weeping is about vulnerability and even though Christ is all about that, White Supremacy culture wants nothing to do with it.

We white folks, men in particular, are so uncomfortable with a weeping Jesus that the largely white male scholars who gave us the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible softened the language to "Jesus began to weep." Like somehow, he just started but don't worry, he didn't really cry. White America hears "Jesus wept" and gets nervous. That doesn't sound like a strong leader. That doesn't

sound like something I'd be comfortable doing in front of a big group of people.... or maybe in front of anybody.

I'm not crying ... you're crying.

I think that's why Don McLean's American Pie has such a special and lasting place in White America. In many ways, it is White America's national song of lament.

A lament sung by a people who confuse stoicism and silence with strength.

A lament sung by a people who too often instead of expressing our pain dull it with whiskey and rye.

A lament sung by a people who tend to cry and tremble only when we're alone and when no one else can see. Who instead just smile and turn away.

American Pie has become a lament not so much for Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, the Big Bopper and the plane crash that took their lives, but a lament for all the death, for all the loss that we are told that we should not grieve out loud.

And 40 years after its release, American Pie is still as close as many of us get to singing the blues.

And of course, we as the Episcopal Church have both been shaped by and have helped to shape that dominant White American culture. I was taught in seminary that funerals are supposed to be services of the resurrection ... and that my job as a priest was to put on a white stole and talk about Easter, never mind if we hadn't given ourselves a chance truly to be in Good Friday ... I guess that's something we're supposed to do somewhere else.

At home.

By ourselves.

In private.

I'm not crying ... you're crying.

And yet ... Jesus did cry. Jesus wept. He wept at the death of his friend, Lazarus.

Think about that for a second. Jesus, with bad news on the doorstep, he couldn't take one more step. Something touches him deep inside and he weeps for his friend who has died. He allows himself to be in that place of grief, to sing the blues, deeply, publicly ... so much so that even the first reaction of the Temple authorities who were reaching the crescendo of their persecution of him was to be moved themselves and say, "Wow. See how he loved him!"

John's Gospel tells us "Jesus wept." Perhaps the most powerful two words in scripture. But most of my experience of us doing the same thing in the church is when people come up to me and either apologize for their tears

"I'm so sorry, I told myself I wouldn't cry."

or talk about how grateful they are that they didn't, like they dodged some terrible bullet.

“Wow. That almost had me in tears there for a second.”

I mean, what we’re really saying is, “Oh, I’m so sorry something happened here that actually moved me ... that actually put me in touch with my pain in a way that has some integrity. Oh, I’m so sorry that something real happened here. In us. In me.”

We’ve gotta get over that!

We just heard the story of Zacchaeus in Luke’s Gospel. Now we know two things about Zacchaeus. That he was a tax collector and that he was short. And the Gospel tells us the reason he went up the tree to see Jesus was the latter ... was because he was short.

But I’m not so sure.

You see, being a tax collector meant that Zacchaeus had made a choice. A choice that had made him rich but that also had cost him dearly. He was the face, the voice, the embodiment of the Roman Empire’s oppression of his own people. He not only collected taxes from his own Jewish people for the Empire, he skimmed off the top ... that’s how he got rich.

And ... there was a cost. Zacchaeus was a man without a country. He was seen as a traitor to his own people and yet was still not a citizen of the Empire. The cost of his wealth was not only his integrity but community. And we know that was getting to him. We know that something was missing in his life. Something his wealth couldn’t buy. We know that there was some profound grief, some deep wound in his life that needed healing.

How?

Because he came out to see Jesus in the first place.

I think Zacchaeus was in that tree not only because he was short and not only because the crowd wouldn’t have him ...but because he didn’t want the crowd to see him. He didn’t want the crowd to see that this powerful man was missing something. That he was not immune to grief. That he, too, had a wound that needed healing. That in the true spirit of “I’m not crying ... you’re crying” ... that yes, Zacchaeus was crying, too.

But Jesus sees.

Jesus looks up and sees Zacchaeus and says “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at *your* house today.”

Jesus sees Zacchaeus fully. He knows his whole life. He knows why he is in that tree. He knows everything he has done to wound others and he knows how wounded he is himself. And he not only invites Zacchaeus to come down to him ... he says “Zacchaeus, I am going to meet you where you are.”

The story of Zacchaeus is a story of great hope, but that hope has its roots not in Zacchaeus’ conversion, but in Jesus’ invitation for him to come out of the place where he was hiding in his pain. Because our pain, our grief, our wounds – the deepest realities of our lives -- this is where Christ meets us and where we meet one another.

A Jesus who weeps. A Jesus who calls us out of our hiding places. A Jesus who says, “I am going to meet you where you are” “I am going to stay with you tonight” is a Jesus who stands among us and tells us that grieving, that weeping is definitely about vulnerability and it isn’t a sign of weakness or lack of faith but of strength and love.

That grieving, that weeping is about being truly human and about being deeply moved by the genuinely hard and even tragic things that happen to all of us in life. About letting something touch us deep inside on those days when it feels like the music has died.

Yes, as our funeral liturgy says, we are people of the resurrection. And yet there can be no “rejoice always” without “Jesus wept.” We cannot be people of resurrection unless we also embrace being people of the crucifixion. To name that which is dying and that which has died.

And as we continue through this pandemic.

As so much of our lives are changing and that change means loss.

As every day brings news of death built on the mistakes of the past and death compounded by the mistakes of the present.

As new griefs touch old wounds and months, years, even decades of tears unshed begin to form cracks in the dams of our eyes it truly is too much. We cannot hold it back any longer. If we are ever going to heal, we have to let ourselves feel.

We can let it out.

We need to let it out.

And where we start is just by naming it.

That’s all.

Just naming it.

We name that which is dying and that which has died, that which we are missing and that which we have lost ... because a wound can’t heal if a wound isn’t named.

And so, we need to have a place where we can come out of our hiding places, where it is safe to grieve and weep, where we can sing our songs of lament.

Where we can say ... yes ... I. Am. Crying.

And so are you.

And we can hold each other and cry together.

On the southwest corner of this building, we have built a scaffolding for this naming of grief. This naming of loss. We call it our Throughline. In writing, a throughline is an invisible thread that binds a story and all its characters together. For us that thread is our grief. It is all we carry on our hearts behind the masks we wear, cloth and otherwise.

We are all grieving. We are all hurting. We are all wounded. Some of us have just learned to hide it better than others.

This Throughline is a scaffolding for you in any way you want ... be it a piece of paper or a photograph clipped to the wire. Or words or art chalked on the pavement. Or any other way you choose ... there is no way to do this wrong.

The Throughline is a place for us simply to name our pain. Our grief. Our loss.

This Throughline is here for all of us ... not just All Saints Church but anyone and everyone to name

What or who has died for you?

What or who is dying in your life right now?

What losses have you suffered?

Who and what do you miss?

What is broken that you fear might never be mended?

What pain are you carrying on your heart?

And what even now, is breaking your heart wide open?

We need name those things not just in the silence of our hearts or alone in our room but together.

To shed tears not just alone but together and to hold onto each other through the bleakest of nights because that is the beginning of healing.

We begin with naming ... and feeling ... and weeping. And we don't stop there.

Because then, even as we still weep, we join with Jesus in singing a different end to the song than what the world would have us sing.

To respond when people hear us singing the blues that we actually do have some happy news, and not just smile and turn away. To invite people into this sacred store where we've heard the music years before and say yes, the music will still play.

And when in the streets the children scream, the lovers cry and the poets dream, we will proclaim another word has been spoken. That the church bells have not been broken. And that the three that we admire most ... the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Ghost ... have not caught the last train for the coast, because this music ... has not ...died.

And because of that, all of us can weep and not be afraid. We can trust that no matter how dry the levee seems, there will never ever be a day the songs we sing in this place fade away.

We can trust that those whom we love but see no longer, are still connected to us and they rejoice and weep with us still.

That while there will come a day for all of us when we will sing "This'll be the day that I die"

The love never has.
The love never does.
The love never will.
AMEN.