

*Today, in the Church's faith-encouraging, yet also heaven-yearning celebration which is All Saints' Day (observed), I want to acknowledge the work of a younger living saint than, by God's grace, am I. He was then Assistant Professor Rev. Thomas J. Egger, who wrote for Concordia Pulpit Resources for November 5, 2017, the sermon study on which I am basing this message. Since then, he has completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree, and currently serves as President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where he is a Professor of Exegetical Theology. Interesting for us in Canada to hear is this biographical historical note: “He previously served as a guest instructor at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in 1999.”*

The value of his work and preparations for this Sunday, nevertheless, reflects the value of God's saints throughout time--past, present, and future. Saints called to purpose from otherwise wandering, meaningless things, are renewed in the power and life of God's living Word, His Word of Living Promise. They become pointers, encouragers, instructors, models, *reflectors* of God's wisdom and grace fulfilled in the Word made flesh, the crucified and risen Saviour, Jesus Christ. His purpose for and with and through His Saints--yes, also you, by grace, through faith--is to seek and save His wandering, lost, fallen creatures. He redeems them to receive the eternal life which is in and with Himself, in divine love and joy, face-to-face, forever!

So today's “Saint Egger” has provided the thoughts and ideas that rise and grow to life also in your hearing through the Word from the Lord through my voice today. Through him, Jesus proclaims to you the certainty, wonder and love of God that will bring to fullness what even in strongest faith is only yearned for here: **“The End of Tears.”**

Dear Saints of Redeemer, as you listen and receive this Word of God today--God is at work also through you to have purpose, to have content and joy, to share the message of the Lamb of God who brings everywhere and to everyone He touches, **“The End of Tears.”**

Saint Egger begins with this connection to reality. Life in this world has often been described as a “vale of tears.” This is an old English way of saying, “valley of tears.” That expression comes from a single Bible passage: Ps.84:6. Our English Bibles today don't translate that psalm verse with “valley of tears.” They just use the Hebrew word, *Baca*: “Blessed are those whose strength is in you [O Lord]. . . . As they go through the Valley of *Baca* they make it a place of springs. . . .” The Valley of *Baca*. That Hebrew word *Baca* is related to “weeping.” The valley of weeping. The valley of sorrows. The vale of tears. It's a way of describing the pilgrimage of God's people through this life, through this “valley of tears,” on our way to the eternal joys of God's kingdom. Although our English Bibles no longer use that phrase in Ps 84:6, the expression “valley of tears” is still well known to us--and the *experience* of life as a “valley of tears”--well, I know some of you have crossed that territory. It goes beyond words!

The experience of the “valley of tears” indeed touches God's saints. By God's Holy Spirit's living presence, we who believe in Jesus *are* God's saints, but we are not immune to sorrows. Quite the contrary. Yet, as we observe this All Saints' Day, we rejoice, because, yes,

Life in This World Is Often a “Vale of Tears,” but the Day Is Coming When God Will Wipe Away Our Tears Forever.

Just listen to the news that bombards us daily. Who could deny that this world truly is a vale of tears! Yet to hear the ads in-between the live clips, we get a steady diet from advertisers and marketers who promote products and services, travels and events that promise an escape from pain or sadness. The world would have us leave it all behind, put off tears, deny them. But reality is: ultimately no one escapes the “valley of tears.”

That valley flows with so many sources of tears. Grief over death takes on so many faces. The tears and cries of grief, the horror of blood, sadness over suffering of children and families,

whether it's from wars or catastrophes of weather, flooding, fires, earthquakes--or needless violent shootings--these inundate our minds and hearts. We well up in sadness and discomfort hearing of Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Morocco, Libya, Syria, even New Brunswick. And what adds heartache to these stressful events and times is to see and realize such a high percentage of the cause is the willful acts of human beings. Rampant is Injustice. Callous the mistreatment, calculated the persecution that suffocates the hopes of this world.

Tears flow from loneliness or rejection. Tears flow from sympathy for others. Tears flow from conscience convicted of the reality of our own sin and guilt.

Does that conviction grab our hearts? Scripture leads us to the reality of tears, even where we might be dull or blind. Listen to the record of Ezra 9:15-10:1: **“O Lord, the God of Israel, You are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before You in our guilt, for none can stand before You because of this.”** While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly.

Luke 7:37-38: . . . **behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that [Jesus] was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.**

Or take the jolt that had to be at the centre of these tears: Mt 26:75: **And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.**

Do we recognize our own sin rightly and fully? Taken to heart, we, too, must weep greatly and bitterly. And where we are slow to acknowledge or let these things get to us, perhaps the reality of pain or other suffering brings home the reality of our lost condition apart from God.

God's Word in the Psalms describes the grief of life in vivid terms:

Psalm 31:9 **“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.”**

Psalm 42 opens in the living yearning of a deer panting for water--**“so pants my soul for You, O God.”** Then v.3: **“My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?' ”**

For those following the two year Bible reading plan, we've recently crossed 1 Samuel 30:3-4, and how it relates to the TV's dreadful news these days: **“And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.”**

Even in our happiest moments, there is often some sorrow. Author Henri Nouwen observes: “There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our lives. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the most happy moments of our existence we sense a tinge of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success, there is the fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is the knowledge of surrounding darkness. When you touch the hand of a returning friend, you already know that he will have to leave you again. . . . But this intimate experience in which every bit of life is

touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to the day when our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us.”

(Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2004), 53-54.

The Word of the Lord reveals God accompanies us through our “valleys of Baca.” For God brings forth the pure light of His infinite compassion for us. Let's trace His Way in His Word.

God is not blind or deaf to our weeping. “I AM” heard the Israelites enslaved in Egypt and called Moses to be His servant to deliver them from their cruel bondage. (cf Ex 3:1-8) God heard jealous Sarah's slave woman Hagar's cries for Ishmael and herself after Abraham drove them into the wilderness, to keep peace with Sarah and Isaac. (Gn.21:8-21) Or remember childless Hannah who appeared drunk to Eli the priest, but who persisted in faith, and received the blessing that she would bear a child. She named him Samuel, for the Lord heard her plea with tears and great anxiety and vexation. (1 Sam 1:9-20)

What tears have you shed? This same God *has* seen *your* tears and heard *your* weeping. The Psalmist David reflects on God's presence nevertheless with him in the vale of tears when he recounts: **“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?”** (Ps 56:8)

God has done more than notice our tears. Yes, even more than count them! Jesus entered into our vale of tears. He, the Messiah, the Christ, has entered into our valley of sorrows.

Consider His own travail! There was no room for Jesus' parents in the inn. Soon after Jesus' birth, Herod came seeking for His life. What injustice, even as the Father in heaven alerted Joseph in a dream to leave and preserve Jesus' life. Nevertheless, Herod's raging paranoia brought wailing to many mothers of slaughtered boys aged two and under. (Mt 2:16-18)

Jesus Himself experiences all the sorrows of this world; He weeps. The Gospel record records how Jesus shed tears and wept with Mary and Martha at the loss of their brother and His friend, Lazarus, to death. (Jn 11:33, 35)

Jesus wept over Jerusalem and its coming divine judgment. (Lk 19:41)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out in sorrow over the bitter path of betrayal, abandonment, and death that lay before Him. **He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.”** (Mk 14:33-34)

But God in Christ Jesus also came to do more than simply weep with the sorrowful. He came to take away their tears!

“Do not weep” Jesus said in compassion to the widow at Nain, who wept over her dead son in procession of funeral. Jesus raised the boy from the funeral bier and returned him alive to his mother. (cf Lk 7:11-17)

“Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping,” Jesus announced to those who bewailed the death of Jairus's little daughter. The people who heard laughed at that and mocked Him, but Jesus did raise the girl back to life. Mocking laughter became laughter of the joy of life! Their tears were gone! (cf Lk 8:40-55)

“Mary!” Jesus said to Mary Magdalene as she wept in the garden outside His tomb. His living voice brought her--and through her, Saint Mary Magdalene--*us*--resurrection joy! (Jn 20:11-16)

So our God wants us to see life anew from His perspective! One day, His faithful Word declares, our God will wipe away every tear--forever.

This world is a vale of tears, but its tears are *temporary!* God promises us: **“Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”** Ps 30:5b.

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** (John 16:20-22)

The day approaches when John's vision of Revelation 7 will be our own vision. See it now:

Everywhere you look, there's a huge multitude from every nation, all in white, with palm branches and song, who worship Christ the Lamb. No hunger! No thirst! *And no tears!*

The blood of the Lamb who was slain (v 14) has made all the difference. The pride and guilt that separated us from our Creator has been atoned for by the pain and suffering Jesus bore in our place. His blood covers all our sins!

In that day, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, forever. What a touching reality. Wiping away someone else's tears is one of the most intimate of all personal interactions. It is the very picture of empathy and compassion. The caring one is acknowledging and sharing the hurt and the grief behind those tears.

But the act of wiping away someone's tears is not simply joining with them in grief; it's not just “weeping with those who weep.” Taking your fingers and drying someone's tears says something; it personally promises hope: “Don't cry. Let me dry your tears. You're not alone. I'm here to help, to shoulder the burden, to mend things. No more tears now. It will be okay. I promise.”

For now, we wait. And often, we weep. In this life, we sow in tears. **“Blessed are those who mourn,”** Jesus says, **“for they shall be comforted.”** (Mt 5:4)

And as we wait for the day God will dry our tears, we look for opportunities to dry the tears of others, to extend to them God's own compassion, to bring them the Good News of Jesus--who saw *their* tears, carried *their* sorrows, cleansed *them* by His blood, Who will one day wipe every tear from *their* eyes.

Here we are today, gathered together in the Communion of Saints as we observe All Saints' Day. God is here! He is the Living Source for certain Hope in the valley of sorrows. Because Jesus lives, we have reason for Hope through every tear! We celebrate God's faithfulness to those who have died in the faith, whose struggles and sorrows are over, whose tears have ended. God's saints shed many tears in this world. But for His saints in heaven, there is no more crying--just joy. They will behold the face of God (Mt 5:8), and God will behold them. He will reach out His nail-marked hands to them--to us--and wipe away every tear. Amen.

--This message is based on the outline from Rev. Thomas J. Egger, assistant professor, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, in Concordia Pulpit Resources, Volume 27, for All Saints' Day (Observed), November 5, 2017.

--Adapted and proclaimed by Rev. Jonathan Asmus, Redeemer Lutheran Church, West Kelowna, BC