

"Jesus Wept: The Human Side of God"
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Our text this morning is the simple phrase "Jesus Wept" (John 11:35). It comes from the story of the Raising of Lazarus and we are going to be looking at the image of God that is given to us through that story.

The core theology of the New Church is: "The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns and His kingdom will last for ages of ages" (True Christianity 791). It is not a complicated view of God: God is a Divine Human Being who came on Earth as Jesus Christ. Is the core and the beginning of all our theology.

It is the message we see preached in the beginning of the Gospel of John: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The Word, the All-Powerful, Infinite, Eternal God came down on earth as a Human Being and dwelt among us.

But while He was on earth as Jesus Christ, not even His disciples always grasped this. When Jesus told His disciples: "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him," His disciple Philip asked Jesus to "show us the Father." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:7-9).

God is the I Am, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, born on earth as Jesus Christ to be the Human Manifestation of God, the Immanuel, "God With Us" (Matt 1:23).

How lucky we are to have this image of God as a Divine Human Being! Throughout human history, so many people didn't have this image of God. Even today, many people don't have this idea of Jesus as God, and many don't even have any image of God at all. Throughout the history of religion there have been and still are many religious traditions that have focussed on the infinite, impersonal divine nature of God. They say that God Himself cannot be limited to any human terms and that trying to know God in human terms is not really knowing God because God is infinite and beyond all human conception.

Of course there is a truth in looking at God as something far beyond what we can grasp because God is Infinite and Unlimited and we are finite and limited. But is a God who is beyond our grasp an inspiring idea of God? Is it an idea of God upon which we can base our lives? Is it a God we can know? Is it a God we can love? Is it even an accurate picture of God?

Many religious traditions throughout the ages have also acknowledged this point. They know that we need some kind of finite image of God to have some way of seeing God. According to New Church theology, in the earliest times people were taught principles about God by angels from heaven and they saw qualities of God manifested in all the physical things around them. When people in most ancient times saw mountains they thought of "elevation" and "height", and

those concepts led to thinking about heaven and heavenly thought which is higher than natural thought. When they saw the sun they thought not of what the sun of the physical earth did, but the sun of the spiritual world and how God is like a sun. They thought of how its light is like Divine Wisdom that enlightens us all and how its warmth is like Divine Love that enlivens us all. This was true for all things in nature. All of nature was seen as a theater representing the Lord and His Kingdom (see Secrets of Heaven #3483). With this view God was present with them everywhere.

But in time this way of viewing things deteriorated. It seems the people of those ancient times began to lose the connection between the object and what it represented about God. The object became confused with the source and they began to think that the object itself was somehow infused with God. They placed the importance in the image itself, not simply in what it represented. This was the origin of idolatry. The sun and moon, for example, went from being seen as natural objects that represented aspects of God to being worshiped as gods themselves. And since everything in nature represented God in some way, idolatry was combined with polytheism—the worship of many gods. The true idea of God was lost.

Seeing God in nature is important. It's also understandable seeing God in this way could lead to humans losing the true image of God. Since people can't see God as He is in Himself, they start to look in terms of what they see. What we see when we look outside is nature. But then we start to make conclusions about God based on our own observations of nature. In an effort to make God visible to us, the visible form we put on God is nature. But can we grasp all of nature? Is that the way for us really to truly see God? Many of us, when we are out in nature, feel God's presence strongly there. We see many things that inspire us to think about God. This is a wonderful avenue for seeing God since all of nature is a theater representative of the Lord. But is it really the best way of seeing God? Does it give us everything about God?

Nature is impersonal. Can we have a person to person relationship with something that is impersonal? A relationship with nature or even with an impersonal God just isn't the same as a relationship with another human being. We human beings need a more concrete image of God. We need a vision of God that we can emulate, imitate, follow. We need a God that we can have a relationship with. We need a God that is human so we can have a human to human relationship.

We can't really imitate the Divine because we are not divine. We can't imitate the Infinite because we are not infinite. We can't really follow Life Itself, Wisdom Itself, or Love Itself. We can't be omniscient. We can't be omnipotent. We can't be omnipresent. All of those qualities that religions around the world have always given to God—the Divine Force, the Divine Creator—are hard to connect with. They are not really on our level. We can't even really begin to grasp those aspects of God let alone connect on that level.

In order to connect with God, human beings started to put the forces of nature in more personal terms. It is easy to see, then, how the myths of the great religions started. We turned those forces and those qualities of God into things that we can grasp. We needed to have them be more human. In order to make them human, though, instead of having the Lord present Himself

as a Human to us, what we see in human history is us creating human gods in our own image. We give those gods Divine powers. We give them the exalted human qualities like wisdom and beauty and love. But we also give them human weaknesses—anger, greed, jealousy. And we have those gods do very ungodlike things.

But the good news is we don't actually have to imagine what God would be like as a human being. That is the Good News of the New Testament, the Good News of the Lord's story on earth. We know what God would be like as a human being because He came into the world and showed us what He is like as a human being. We know from the Book of Genesis that in the beginning we were created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26). God is a Divine Human Being, and we get our humanness from that God. As the human race fell away from loving God and we turned farther and farther away from God, we turned farther and farther away from the idea of God as a Divine Human Being from whom we gain our humanity. When the Lord Himself comes to earth as Jesus Christ, He comes in a way that shows us both His Divinity and His Humanity.

We can especially see these aspects of God in the story of the Raising of Lazarus (John 11). We see His Divine nature through His Divine power as He does things only God can do. We also see, perhaps more than almost anywhere else in the Word, His Human side, His Human connection to people, His one to one human love that He has for every single one of us.

Let's look first at some of those images of the Lord's Divine Power in the story. We read that Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went out to meet Him. She said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). She shows a belief in the Lord's tremendous power, that the Lord even has the power to give life. But at this point Martha seems to think that, while Jesus could have saved him, now it's too late. So Jesus said to her, "your brother will rise again" (John 11:23).

"Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."" (John 11:24-27). We see strong images of the Lord's power there. The Lord is teaching that He does have all power, even the power over death, and that truth is acknowledged by Martha.

We see the message of the Lord's power again when Jesus comes to the tomb: "Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out

bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:38-44). The Lord has the power to bring people back to life!

The Lord shows His power in so many ways in the New Testament. He shows it when He walks on water. He shows His tremendous power when He heals blind people, when He heals the lame, when He feeds people miraculously. We see it in this story, the seventh of His miracles in the Gospel of John. It occurs soon before the Easter story. Here He shows that He has the power to raise someone from the dead—not just at the Last Days at a Last Judgment, as they are thinking, but raise them right now. This is tremendous power, power never before seen in a human being.

We always need to see that Divine nature of God, a God with all power. But the story also shows a human side of God. That image starts right off in the beginning of the story where Jesus is told about Lazarus, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (John 11:3). Love is brought in right at the beginning of that story. But when He gets there, we start to see the Lord's loving side really come out. After Martha comes to meet Jesus she tells her sister Mary, and when Mary comes to the Lord, she falls at his feet, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). This is a very human story. This is someone coming to the Lord, weeping about her brother being dead.

We read further, "When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" (John 11:33). The great Creator of the Universe—the one in charge of life and death, the one in charge of all things down here and is present among us—groans in His spirit, feels the pain and shows the pain in a way we've never seen before. God groans over human suffering.

Then He does something extraordinary: "Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (John 11:35-36). The powerful almighty God seen throughout history is actually a God who can come down and be amongst us as a human being. God can love like other human beings. It's not an abstract, impersonal kind of love either. It's a very concrete love, a very particular love. It's a love for a specific person, Lazarus. The Lord loves each person individually, personally. God has a personal love for each one of us. This is ground changing. We see here something that had been missing from other pictures of God: God's humanity.

We are taught in the passage I read earlier in our lessons from the book *True Christianity* #370: "Jehovah came down and became human so that He could come close to us and we could come close to Him and a partnership could be forged through which we could have salvation and eternal life. When God became human and then a human became God, He became able to draw near us in this adapted form as a human God and as a Divine Human forge a partnership with us."

The whole point of His showing himself as human is so that we can actually have a partnership with the Lord. Having God be more distant and above us is comforting in many ways, but this new image that the Lord gives us is one that is personal to us, one that can lead us in a new

way, one that can show us human love. The Lord adapted Himself to our understanding so He could be closer to us and so we could draw nearer to the Lord. The Lord, in a sense, changes. He adapts Himself to a physical human form so that we human beings can better see Him and love Him. He comes in a form we human beings can emulate and follow.

As we look towards Easter and see the tremendous power the Lord has, we also see the tremendous love that comes with it. We see the Lord at his most human, his most vulnerable. We will see it in the stories of Good Friday. We will see it in the stories of Easter morning as the Lord rises. We also see it prefigured here in the story of the Raising of Lazarus which, in the Gospel of John, happens almost immediately preceding the Easter story. We can see God coming on Earth, changing his way of showing himself to us for our sake, so that we can connect with Him.

It is literally an image of God that changed the world. The Lord as a Divine Human Being changed the history of religion. It changed this planet through the rise and spread of Christianity. Ultimately, it is here to change us.

So as we look at the pictures of the Lord given in the Word, we need to see God as Divine. We need to see Him as beyond us human beings. We need God to do the God things that we mere human beings can't do. We need to have someone in charge of the bigger picture, someone we can trust to have the plan and that is executing the plan. We need to know that somebody, somewhere does have it all under control, that there's nothing that happens outside of God's plan, and that the Lord can always lead us back from wherever we go.

But we also need to see God as Human. We can't just leave God kind of up there managing things from on high. We need to see God as right here among us. We need to see God as feeling every emotion that we've ever had and as being aware of every thought we have. We need to see God as having gone through every experience that we've all gone through, felt the pain of going through trials and struggles, and knowing what that feels like as a human being. We need God to be Human, the Word made Flesh, down here with us. And we need to know the Lord Lord weeps. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35)

So to close, the Lord is truly Divine. He is far above and beyond us maintaining an order and a justice and a mercy on the cosmic and eternal scale that we can't be fully aware of. But the Lord is fully and truly Human too. He knows each and every single one of us and He knows us personally.

May we find peace and comfort in the Divinity of the Lord and may we also be stirred with compassion and love for one another as the Lord modeled for us as a human being here on Earth.

AMEN.

Lessons: John 11:17-44; True Christianity 370:3; True Christianity 109