

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in our sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

This Sunday was just like any other Sunday. I got up way too early, got ready, arrived at church, survived presiding at the first service and teaching Sunday school. I was heading into my second service, Grace's third service when I was stopped by one of our members whose husband was a PA at the emergency room at Mt. Nittany Medical Center. She looked at me and said in a panic, "Pastor someone needs to get over to the ER right away. John John died." Oh no! My heart sunk.

John John was a beloved member of our church family. He was fifty-two years old and had down syndrome. His parents John and Betta had cared for him from birth. They had him in every program possibly designed for children with downs, in hopes that he would be as successful as possible within his capacity. John John did well in school and graduated from high school. He was an active member of the local boy scout troop until the day he died and had earned an Eagle Scout ranking. He knew most of the people at a church, far more than I did as a pastor to six hundred active members. And every single time I saw him he would run up to me and wrap his arms around me and say, "Sister it's so great to see you!" How well John John did with his life and how long he lived, which seems young to us, but is in fact a long life for someone with down's syndrome, is a testament to his parent's love and insistence and concern on his behalf. When I heard the news of his death I was distraught and upset and very, very worried about John and Betta, whose whole world was John John.

I immediately went to Pastor Lynn who informed me that I was the only one who was disposable that day, he was preaching, and that I needed to go to the hospital. So off I went. When I entered the ED I was greeted by my member who was the PA. He warned me of John

and Betta's distress and agony over the loss of their only son. I wasn't surprised at all. I couldn't even imagine what it was they were going through.

He pointed me towards the room and in I went. Now until the day I die I will never forget what happened, how I was greeted when I entered into that room. You see as I walked in, Betta through her tears and with a very angry face glanced up at me and said, "My God pastor I hate your hair. It is awful. You look like a ridiculous man." And then she looked back over at John John and continued to sob. This may not make sense to you, but you see earlier that week I went from long hair like I have now to a pixie style haircut. You know the kind, really, really short, similar to a man's haircut. This was the first time Betta had seen my new hair.

I think most people who enter into a room of someone they care about and were greeted in that manor would be upset. After all, Betta basically told me she hated the way I looked, but I wasn't upset at all. In fact, I recognized what was happening. I'd seen it before. Betta came off as angry, as offensive even. But under the surface. Under that snarled lip and burrowed brow, her heart was full of grief and pain. She was filled with sadness of the reality of her present and the void that would show up every single day for the rest of her life. She was walking in darkness, she would be without her beloved child and life would never be the same.

I imagine this is the background for our gospel lesson this morning. On the surface we see an angry Jesus overturning the money changer's tables in the temple. We see him cracking a whip in a fit of rage. But as I play this scene in my mind I can't help wonder under the surface what is going on with Jesus? Are Jesus' emotions similar to Betta's emotions? Is what he is feeling and what he does just grief and sadness masked by anger? As I thought about this interesting twist on Jesus's story I thought perhaps it would be fun to explore this a little bit more.

Let's take a minute to place this story into a bigger, broader context. Jesus has just entered triumphantly into Jerusalem. The crowds greeted him with shouts of Hosanna. They cheered. They were so happy for Jesus' arrival. He was treated like a king. All was good and well. Then the Monday of Holy Week we have this scene that we read in our gospel for today. We have Jesus getting off that donkey, entering the temple and appearing to be angry as he drives the animals out of the temple and pours out the money changers money and flips tables. What in the world happened? What a juxtaposition between a triumphant parade and this crazy bar scene. What is going on?

If we believe that Jesus was truly fully human and fully divine which we as Christian Lutherans do, Jesus knew what was about to happen to him. He knew that those same crowds that were cheering for him yesterday were going to turn on him in just a short time. He knew that his disciples, those who were closest to him, those who he had handpicked and spent three years teaching every single thing he knew about what ministry should look like and who God was and what God was about, he knew they were about to hand him over. Jesus knew that he was about to die for the sake of the world. And while I'm sure he was angry and disappointed at what was going on inside that temple, under the surface, like Betta, I'm positive that Jesus was deeply grieved and was overwhelmingly sad. He was grieved for the brokenness of the world, and grieved that he would be the sacrificial lamb. That grief manifested itself in anger, anger at the institution, anger at the people who would exploit the poor, anger at the people who pretended they cared about others, but who really didn't care about others at all. Today we see angry, upset, full of passion and emotion Jesus.

I know this may be strange, but I actually enjoy this text. I enjoy it not because I like to see Jesus angry and upset, but because I like to see Jesus as human. When we are overcome with

emotions we all have the capability to say things that we don't mean. We have the ability to do things that we wished we hadn't of, things that we wish we could change. When we are overcome with emotion we get passionate about what we believe to be right and true. Here we see passionate Jesus. A Jesus who has come to usher in a new reign, a new way of doing things. We see a Jesus who is saying "no more". He's saying in the new kingdom that is being ushered in, there will be no corruption. There will be no more exploitation. There will be no more making people feel that they are anything less than worthy of the love God has to give them. And he knows, he is grieved even, that his death is what will usher that reign in.

All that being said, it also is clear to me that even in this experience of anger, Jesus does not take his eyes off the prize so to speak. Jesus is clearly focused on God and God's will and God's promises. He speaks of the raising of the temple, meaning his body. He knows that even though he is about to walk through a very dark valley, even though he will be mocked, beaten, bruised and hung on a cross to die, he knows that even on the other side of death God promises good to his people. And Jesus knows, as do we thanks to his promises, that the underlying goodness is the gift of eternity spent with God. But does that mean he isn't human and doesn't feel and doesn't experience anger and frustration at the world and its people? No. Absolutely not. Does it mean that he isn't grieved and overwhelmed with sadness, the same as us? No way. Jesus is human, just like us.

So the next time you are overcome with anger, or grief, or sadness. The next time you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders. The next time you aren't sure you're going to make it through the rest of your day. I invite you to focus on Jesus. Focus on his determination to make the kingdom of God start breaking into our world right now. Focus on seeing the places in your lives in which he promises to show up. And under that anger, under that sadness, under that

grief, you will find wholeness and a future that is filled with all the wrongs of this world made right. One day. One sweet day. Amen.