

JESUS WEEPS FOR JERUSALEM (LUKE 19)

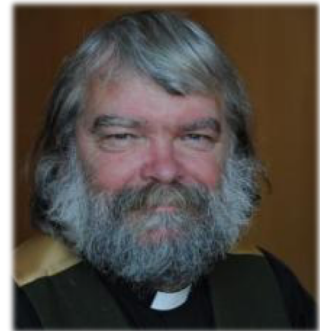
Balliol College, Oxford

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May I speak in the Name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A year ago I went to a literary festival and at the opening gala dinner I was sat next to an extraordinary priest and college chaplain. He had a big bushy beard, pepper black and white hair, a beautiful warm smile and a contagious laugh.



It was in fact the Church of England poet-priest, Malcolm Guite. He is not famous outside the Church of England but he is still brilliant. Now I am not here as his agent but I want to share with you a poem of his about Jesus weeping.

*Jesus comes near and he beholds the city
And looks on us with tears in his eyes,
And wells of mercy, streams of love and pity
Flow from the fountain whence all things arise.
He loved us into life and longs to gather
And meet with his beloved face to face
How often has he called, a careful mother,
And wept for our refusals of his grace,
Wept for a world that, weary with its weeping,
Benumbed and stumbling, turns the other way,
Fatigued compassion is already sleeping
Whilst her worst nightmares stalk the light of day.
But we might waken yet, and face those fears,
If we could see ourselves through Jesus' tears.*

As you probably can hear, this poem describes the moment when Jesus approaches Jerusalem for the last time, before his inevitable arrest and execution. Luke records the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

The Lord rode into the city on a colt. The disciples spread their clothes on the road and lavish Him with praises "saying:" 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! (Luke 19:28-44)

One would think such an occasion would bring happiness, but instead, "... as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

We are often touched when others cry –the tears of a child or of a grieving mother or wife. But, when a man of strength, power, and conviction cries, we know we are in the presence of deep emotion. Why did Jesus weep?

1. Spiritual ignorance. God came to the Jews in the person of Jesus Christ but they failed to recognize Him. *“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes”* (Luke 19:42)
2. For the human pain and suffering to come. Jesus knew judgment day was coming and that Jerusalem would be besieged and destroyed. *“They will dash you to the ground, you and children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”* (Luke 19:44).
3. For himself. Although he knew that he would rise again, he wept for what was to be inflicted upon him by his own people; the citizens of Israel to whom he had delivered the good news of the Kingdom, and who had rejected him and were now trying to kill him.



When I think of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, I think of Rembrandt’s portrait: *The Head of Christ*. For this painting Rembrandt used a real-life model (this was unheard of before) which enabled Rembrandt to portray Jesus as a man; a man with human emotions. You can see his sadness and anxiety in his expression and the way he holds his head.

Another brilliant depiction is the sculpture at the Oklahoma City National Memorial honours the victims, survivors, rescuers, and all who were affected by the 1995 bombings. Here, Jesus hides his face in his hands and looks away from the site of the bombing and towards the niches in the granite wall which represent each of the victims.

But personally I think Jesus weeps for us as we fail:

- a) To fight injustice;

b) To do him honour by loving ourselves.



And it is the latter that I want to impress on you today and to do that I want to introduce you to another bearded priest. This one is called Fr. Richard Rohr, a globally recognized ecumenical teacher, and he wrote a book called *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*.

Jeremiah 1:5. Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart .

You were made in the image of God.

Richard Rohr quotes:

“God seems to be about turning our loves around and using them toward the great love that is their true object.”

“The soul, the True Self, has everything, and so it does not require any particular thing. When you have all things, you do not have to protect any one thing. True Self can love and let go. The False Self cannot do this. The “do not cling to me” encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene is the most painted Easter scene, I am told.”

“Your soul is who you are in God and who God is in you. You can never really lose your soul; you can only fail to realize it, which is indeed the greatest of losses: to have it but not have it (Matthew 16:26).”

“Jesus is much more concerned about shaking your foundations, giving you an utterly alternative self-image, world image, and God image, and thus reframing your entire reality. Mere inspiration can never do this.”

“True self” and “false self”, made for trance and endless horizons
Like mining for a diamond ... dig deep
Doubt is the necessary partner to real faith.

God is Love: *God is love and those who live in love live in God and he in them.* (John 4:7)

Amen.

Postscript: How can we love ourselves better?

Here are a few bits of further reading for those interested in learning more about self-love and becoming closer to God.

Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality: Making Space for God by Tim Stead. Stead looks at what

Christianity can learn from Mindfulness to become more aware of ourselves in the present moment and in a non-judgmental way.

Immortal Diamond: The search for our true selves by Richard Rohr.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life by Karen Armstrong.