

“From Weeping to Rejoicing”

Introduction: One of our go-to, Netflix escape shows during this past year of pandemic has been *The Crown*. It’s an historical drama that chronicles the life of the royal family in England, in particular, the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, who took over the throne from her father, George, in 1952, and is still there.

But it was never intended to be that way. The line of the throne actually ran through Elizabeth’s uncle, Edward. However, Edward abdicated the throne in order to marry a woman who the family, as well as the church of England, did not approve of, so the throne was passed to his brother, George, and his family. As the series makes clear, such a move did not make things easy for George’s family. The roles and responsibilities and relationships that they thought they would be living changed dramatically, and forever, and not necessarily for the better.

We, in the family of God, celebrate a dramatic change today when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus. Fortunately, that change comes not because, contra Edward, Jesus abdicated his responsibilities but because he took them head on, saying “not my will, Father, but your will be done.” He then went on to die for our sin, rise from the dead, and assume the throne of the universe. Everything changed. . . forever. . . but for better. Weeping may remain for a night, as we just heard the psalmist put it, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

This promise has actually been one I’ve clung to over the past, pandemic-filled year, and it seemed like an appropriate one to reflect on with you on this Easter day when we move from death to new life. It actually is just one of the many stark contrasts found in Psalm 30, in which the psalmist takes us from being in the depths to being lifted up, from needing help to being healed, from being on the edge of the pit to being spared, from God’s anger to his favor, from weeping to rejoicing, from being dismayed to feeling secure, from wailing to dancing, from sackcloth (clothing that symbolizes mourning) to joy, and from silence to praise. These are dramatic changes that are all ultimately made possible by the resurrection, and ascension, of Jesus. It would be worth going back over this psalm this week and asking: Which pair of contrasts most speaks to you?

I. Weeping

A. Perhaps I picked this one because weeping seems to capture so much of what we’ve been through since last Easter, at which we were not even able to be together. Talk about weeping! And then there are the tears that an on-going pandemic has brought, from over half a million dead, just in our country alone, to the loss by many of employment and living situations, to increased tension in our relationships, to the struggles kids (and parents) had (both intellectual and emotional) in staying in school, to giving up the many ways we interacted and met with others, from shopping malls to sports stadiums to sanctuaries . . . there has been much to weep about, much to grieve.

B. And then there are the tears that came with the reminder of the horror of racism that surfaced in our national life last summer, and has, unbelievably, surfaced again in recent weeks. The way people of non-white skin colors continue to be treated, and the structural components of that treatment just don’t seem to go away; they are cause for weeping.

C. And then there is the political nightmare that our country experienced, with divisions taking root in our families, in our workplaces, and in our churches, with opposing parties refusing to listen to one another and unwilling to try to do anything together for the common good, preferring instead to be led by pride and self-interest. A cause to weep.

D. And then, quietly beneath all of this noise, lay the many and various personal tears we shed when we realize that the cause for weeping is not just in the “big out there” somewhere but can be found deep in our own soul through what we have done, or left undone, as the words of the classic confession put it.

1. As an example here, consider David who, the background of this psalm seems to suggest, trusted in his army instead of the Lord. He numbered his fighting men, which indicated a lack of trust in God’s power and guidance cf. 2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 21). “Things are good,” David concluded with confidence as he surveyed his troops, “I feel secure; I will never be shaken” he uttered (30:6). How often might we suffer from misplaced confidence, trusting in our own efforts and strength, trusting in circumstances we feel are favorable and so, maybe, becoming a little cocky or even arrogant, believing we don’t really need God around?

2. Or think of Peter who, you may remember told Jesus during his arrest that he would be sticking by him through thick and through thin, through prison and even death (Lk. 22:34). However, by the time the rooster who lived in the courtyard of the high priest had crowed two times, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. It happened just like Jesus had warned it would happen and it caused Peter to weep bitterly (Lk. 22:62). How often can we find ourselves here, either ignoring Jesus directly, or turning our backs on how he’s called us to live?

3. Or remember the flat-out disappointment of the two disciples who, after the crucifixion, were trudging back their home in Emmaus, utterly confused and saddened by what they had just witnessed. The text in Luke 24 doesn’t say they were weeping, but it does say that their faces were downcast, which I’m sure included a few tears. They were downcast because all that they had hoped Jesus would do—redeem Israel—as they put it, liberating her from pagan domination and putting her back into a leading place among nations, had collapsed under the weight of his horrible death. How often does it seem to us that Jesus disappoints us, that he doesn’t come through how, or when, we think he should?

II. Rejoicing

A. Importantly, into the weeping breaks rejoicing; into suffering and death resurrection bursts. It came to David as God, in some way, rescued him from the depths, from the realm of the dead, from the edge of the pit. The psalm is a celebration of that fact and an invitation by David for the community to celebrate with him. Such a rescue points to a later and even greater rescue of the son of David, Jesus, from actual death, after having been buried for three days. And then Jesus begins to turn that rescue outward as one of the first things on his new agenda, as the angel at the tomb shared the women who were there, was to find Peter. Not to chew him out, not to say, “I told you so,” but to dry his tears, forgive him, and call him to renewed purpose and hope. Jesus wants to find Peter in order to turn his weeping into rejoicing and his wailing into dancing. And then Peter would turn this good news out for the world to hear: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

B. I was struck in reading through the passion narrative in Luke this past week of a comment Jesus made when the rabble carrying swords and clubs came to the Garden of Gethsemane to seize him. When one of his followers pulled out his sword and sliced the ear off the servant of the high priest, Jesus commanded his followers to stop (*behaving like the rabble is not the way my followers do things*). Then, remarkably, he healed the ear of his enemy, and then he declared of them, “But this is your hour—when darkness reigns” (Lk. 22:53). Meaning that darkness and weeping and death will have their day but that they will not have the last word—they will only have an “hour”—because darkness threw its worst at Jesus on the cross and three days later, he rose to defeat it and declare his sovereignty over it, beginning right then.

C. As Peter also reminds us, though we may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1 Pe. 1:6), the resurrection of Jesus assures us, as we sang, that despite those trials, no power of hell, nor any scheme of man, can ever pluck us from our loving heavenly Father’s hand. To go back to the contrasts of Psalm 30, healing and security and rejoicing and dancing, while still moving toward their ultimate fullness, can begin to be celebrated now, because Christ the Lord is risen, today!