

Matt. 5:1-2, 4

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

## Bottles & Bottles of Tears



My life is a not all that hard.

But of course I still complain when my children  
are purposely slow,  
getting in and out of the car.

I still find time to gripe  
when Chick-Fil-A forgets the sweet-spicy-Siracha sauce  
for my chicken sandwich & fries.

I mourned when Bistro 127  
decided to stop making Daylight Donuts.  
That mourning however  
has turned to gladness  
now that Donut Life has proven  
to be delicious and delightful.

I've had grandparents, friends and favorite pets die;  
we have moved and said goodbye  
to places and people,  
and years ago when Tripp and I were dating  
he told me (over the phone) our relationship  
wasn't really working out  
—but then he said, "April fools!"  
Horrible, right?

But in terms of hardships,  
my life really hasn't been all that bad—  
I would say it has had its ups and downs  
like most of us.

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,*  
Jesus tells the disciples and crowds  
and I have often thought,  
what a morbid and puzzling thing to say Jesus.  
How are the mourners, *blessed*?

Our modern, Western culture  
has taught us many coping mechanisms  
to deal with grief and mourning.  
Mostly we want it dealt with  
quickly and efficiently.  
When the grief is not ours to bear  
I think we honestly try  
to be a blessing to others who mourn.

We hope and pray  
to say the right thing  
or recite the right scripture passage  
in hopes that it would make our loved one,  
our friend, our co-worker's grief  
a little more bearable.

But we should notice what Jesus doesn't say  
when he says, *Blessed are those who mourn,*  
*for they will be comforted.*

What Jesus doesn't say is,  
*blessed are those who mourn,*  
*God has a reason for everything*  
...though it is tempting to go that route.

What Jesus doesn't say is,  
*Blessed are those who mourn,*  
*for God has a plan...*  
though it is tempting to offer that  
as a remedy for the pain.

What Jesus doesn't say is,  
*blessed are those who mourn,*  
*everything will be okay...*  
though it sometimes seems  
like the only thing to say.

Scholar and theologian,  
Tom Long suggests  
that the kind of mourning mentioned  
in this beatitude is,  
“not so much mere sadness or weeping  
but prayers of lament  
over the hurt of the world.  
This awareness grows out of (an acute) awareness  
of the difference between  
the world **as it is**  
and the world  
**as God wills it to be.”<sup>1</sup>**  
Which ought to make mourners  
out of most of us.  
We can all see  
that God’s world is not  
what it should be.



When I think of people  
who still mourn today,  
who pour out prayers of lament,  
over land and nations,  
I think of Native Americans.

I just finished a book<sup>2</sup> that is both  
fascinating and heartbreaking;  
it is about the Osage Indians in Oklahoma

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Long, Matthew Interpreters Series

<sup>2</sup> David Grann, Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI (Doubleday Publishers, New York: 2017)

and their story of the Reign of Terror in the 1920's  
that left many of their tribe dead.

It is piece of American history  
I knew absolutely nothing about.

In the early 1800's the Osage people  
were removed from their land in Louisiana  
and pushed toward the Arkansas and Missouri Rivers  
as the white populous  
moved further and further west,  
claiming the land as their own.

The US government moved them from there  
into Kansas territory & then moved them again in the late 1850's,  
giving the Osage land in the Oklahoma hills:  
land that was thought to be largely a waste.  
The area the Osage settled  
was not much larger than Delaware,  
but most whites regarded it as,  
"broken, rocky, sterile,  
and utterly unfit for cultivation,"  
as an Indian Affairs agent put it.

As settlers continued to push westward for land,  
the US government pushed a policy of assimilation  
onto the native peoples calling it, allotment.

Under this policy, the western lands  
were to be parceled out into *real estate*  
where each Osage member could receive  
one allotment of a 160-acre parcel.  
This would assimilate the Osage  
into normalized American citizens  
by making them private property owners  
and give the government  
and private industry  
easier access to procure their land.

In trying to delay the process of allotment,  
the tribe's chief managed  
to convince government officials  
to divide the land among only the tribe

and increased the size from 160 to 657 acres  
AND they wrote into the agreement that  
“the oil, gas, coal, or other minerals  
covered by the lands  
are hereby reserved to the Osage Tribe.”



The Osage had discovered oil  
on their land years before  
and by the time of the agreement,  
there were a few small wells  
that had begun drilling on the reservation.  
Prospectors had to pay the Osage  
for leases and royalties to drill on their land.  
No one could have known  
the Osage land was sitting on top  
of some largest deposits of oil  
in the United States.  
In the early twentieth century  
each person on the tribal roll began  
receiving a quarterly check.  
In 1923 the tribe took in more than \$30 million  
—which today would be over \$400 million.  
A people poor and displaced,  
were now becoming  
the wealthiest Americans  
in the country.

But greed is a powerful tonic  
and Osage's wealth marked them  
as targets for corruption and murder.  
Most Indians were seen  
as primitive and savage,  
the Osage were largely not in charge  
of their money.

Most were given guardians  
who controlled all aspects  
of the Osage's fortune.  
Guardians were supposed to have  
the Osage's best interest at heart,  
but most of them were shady and greedy,  
shysters who wouldn't give  
them their requested funds  
and demanded receipts for every purchase  
from liquor to education.



The Indian Rights Association  
detailed the case of a widow  
whose guardian absconded  
with most of her possessions.  
The guardian falsely told the woman  
she had no more money to draw from  
leaving her to raise  
her two young children in poverty.  
When the widow's baby got sick,  
she pleaded with the guardian  
to give her the money.  
But without proper food  
and medical care,  
the baby died.

The Osage were aware of these schemes  
but had no means to stop them.

After the death of the widow's baby,  
evidence of fraud  
was brought before a county judge,  
only to be ignored.

"There is no hope of justice  
so long as these conditions  
are permitted to remain,"  
the investigator concluded,  
"the human cry of this woman  
is a call to America."

A tribe member speaking to a reporter  
about the guardians said this,  
"Your money draws 'em  
and you're absolutely helpless.  
They have all the law  
and all the machinery on their side.  
Tell everybody,  
when you write your story,  
that they're scalping our souls out here."

Now, surveying the plains,  
May Jo Webb, a gray-haired  
retired school teacher in her 80's  
granddaughter of a murdered tribesman says,  
"This land is saturated with blood."  
She falls silent and then quotes  
from the Cain and Abel story  
of suffering and mourning,  
"The blood cries out from the ground."<sup>3</sup>

An awareness of the difference  
between the world as it is as  
and the world as God wills it to be.  
All is surely not right.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*—all Osage information came from Grann's book

Mourning and grief are the schools  
we never signed up for  
but all of us accidentally get enrolled in.<sup>4</sup>



Grief often gives us  
as Nicholas Wolterstorff says  
a new way to look at the world—  
things that dry-eyes would have missed.  
Dry-eyes would look right past  
the pain, loneliness, and heart ache  
of the people around us.  
Dry-eyes allow us to forget  
the gross unfairness  
of the world's power systems.  
The evil seemed to get rewarded  
while the holy and humble suffer.<sup>5</sup>

Wolterstorff is a well-known  
Christian philosopher and  
wrote a book in the late 1980's, *Lament for a Son*,  
after his 25-year-old son Eric  
died in a mountain climbing accident.  
He wrote, "God is not only  
the God of the *sufferers*  
but the God **who suffers**.  
... It is said of God  
that no one can behold his face and live.  
I always thought this meant  
that no one could see his splendor and live.

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<sup>4</sup> James C. Howell, *The Beatitudes for Today* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY: 2005)

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1987)

A friend said perhaps it meant  
that no one could see God's sorrow and live.  
Or perhaps his sorrow is splendor...  
Instead of explaining our suffering  
God shares it."<sup>6</sup>

I think Wolterstorff might be on to something  
in the same way Jesus is on to something  
in blessing the mourners;  
something profound.  
Perhaps we cannot behold the face of God,  
if sorrow is also God's splendor,  
then we cannot behold God's face  
and live the same again.

Much like Jacob.  
You remember Jacob, right?  
The favored twin son of Isaac and Rebekah?

When Jacob and Esau were born,  
Jacob came into the world  
clutching his brother's heel;  
Jacob's name means  
*he takes by the heel or he supplants,*  
*he ousts, he unseats.*  
Jacob's name mirrors his existence  
as he becomes the schemer  
and the trickster, the supplanter.

Stealing his brother's birth right,  
tricking his father-in-law,  
Jacob becomes an outlaw of sorts,  
who cannot go anywhere  
without looking over his shoulder,  
watching his back.

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<sup>6</sup> ibid, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/143026-lament-for-a-son>



When Jacob has no other option  
than to face his brother  
and face the wrongs he has committed  
he sends his family ahead of him  
and camps alone for the night;  
only to find himself wrestling  
with a mysterious angel  
or God himself  
—scripture isn't clear.

They wrestle, the text says,  
all night and God gives Jacob  
and new name, Israel  
-which means to strive,  
to struggle with God—  
and then asking to be blessed,  
Jacob receives a wound.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes,  
“Who would want to stick around  
to wrestle a dark angel all night long  
if there were any chance of escape?  
The only answer I can think of is this:  
someone in deep need of blessing;  
someone willing to limp forever  
for the blessing that follows  
the wound.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> ibid

Jacob who wrestles with God  
and receives a blessing and wound;  
is that the mourning  
and comfort Jesus proclaims?

Jacob and Esau were two nations  
struggling with each other  
even before birth.

A man given a new name,  
Jacob is now Israel—  
a nation that struggles,  
that knows suffering.

As Jacob limps the next morning,  
wounded and blessed,  
he names the place of his suffering,  
of strife and wrestling,  
he names it Penuel,

*“For I have seen God face to face  
and yet my life is preserved.”  
The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel,  
**limping because of his hip.**” (Gen. 32:30-31)*

As Taylor said,  
*someone willing to limp forever  
for the blessing that follows the wound.*  
When Jacob does see God’s face  
and claims his life was preserved,  
we can’t help but see  
that his name is changed  
to mirror struggle,  
strife and suffering;  
we see his life is preserved  
but his blessing and his wound  
are both permanent and inseparable.

We have to wonder if Jacob  
loses his dry-eyed look on life...  
*Blessed are those who mourn*

*for they shall be comforted.*

Miriam Greenspan is a psychotherapist  
with over 30 years of work.

Her son, died 2 months after he was born,  
having never left the hospital.

“Like every parent struck down  
by such loss,

she woke up every morning  
in the salt sea of grief

and went to bed in it every night,

doing her best to keep her head

above water in between.”<sup>8</sup>

She was grief stricken for weeks,

then months and most people around her

became uncomfortable when her grief  
did not dry up on schedule.

In clinical speak,

grief is given two months

before it is labeled depression;

the most human of all emotions

is given only two months

before it becomes an illness.

Greenspan’s mother was a Holocaust survivor

and had actively grieved for 10 years—

she asks, was that too long a grief  
for genocide?<sup>9</sup>

Greenspan in her many years

of study, research and lived experience,

discovered that individual heartbreak

and the broken heartedness of the world

share a close relationship.<sup>10</sup>

And perhaps that is how it goes  
as Wolterstorff claimed—

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<sup>8</sup> As quoted in Barbara Brown Taylor’s, *Learning to Walk in the Dark* (HarperOne: New York, New York: 2014)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

his mourning gave him eyes  
to see others who suffered.  
God not only sees our mourning  
but shares in it as well...

In Christian theology the Harrowing of Hell  
is referred to the time  
of Christ's descent into hell  
between his crucifixion and resurrection.  
This descent is referred to  
in the Apostle's Creed  
and according to the Catholic Encyclopedia  
the idea of Christ's descent  
was first mentioned  
in (what was called) the gospel of Nicodemus.<sup>11</sup>  
No one really knows  
what happened during the time  
between the crucifixion  
and the resurrection.  
No one except the Divine.  
Yet it is fitting to put our faith  
in the belief and hope  
that Christ would go  
to the depths of hell,  
if there is such a place;  
Christ would certainly go  
where there is seemingly  
no end to suffering;  
Christ would certainly  
go to wherever  
the mourners' tears never dry;  
Christ would descend to the pit,  
to Sheol, to Hades;  
Christ would enter our life,  
our struggle our strife,  
our suffering and mourning  
whatever name we give it—

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<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrowing\\_of\\_Hell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrowing_of_Hell)

and bring comfort and life.

*Blessed are those who mourn  
for they will be comforted.*

Christ in the midst of whatever  
grief and mourning there is;  
a God who sees and shares our sorrow—  
offering assurance  
that it will one day end.

Maybe not today or tomorrow.

Maybe not in the span  
of the next ten years.

The legacy of the Osage Tribe  
is not a story that ends neatly  
or altogether happily.

Behind the story of wealth  
was also the story of murder.

In the 1920's one by one,  
Osage Indians, family members,  
friends and allies  
were poisoned or murdered.

The death toll reached over 24 recorded murders  
before the newly formed FBI stepped in.

The true numbers  
of those murdered  
remains and even darker mystery.

“It’s hard for us to talk about what happened  
during the Reign of Terror,”

says Kathryn Red Corn,  
the director of the Osage Nation Museum.

“So many Osage lost a mother or a father  
or a sister or a brother  
or a cousin.

That pain never goes away.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (Doubleday Publishers, New York: 2017)



*Blessed are those who mourn  
for they will be comforted.*

Anyone who has held a measure of grief  
in their hands knows  
how heavy it can be.

The ache, the pain,  
the memory, the present reality  
—*blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

But the comfort Christ offers?

As we wait,  
for the fulfillment of God's kingdom...  
well maybe there is a verse  
that we can say,  
something we can speak  
in the face the mourning  
we all encounter and feel  
on behalf of the world and each other:

*"You have kept count of my tossings,  
put my tears in your bottle,  
are they not in your record?" (Ps. 56:8)*

Can you imagine  
the bottles and bottles of tears  
our God keeps?

How many bottles and bottles  
are recorded and made note of;  
loving cataloged—noticed; felt; cried over.

God does not see our world,  
our suffering,  
our grief, our mourning  
through dry-eyes.

Sorrow is the splendor  
of seeing God face to face  
and living to tell the tale;  
living a different life,  
seeing what dry-eyes miss.

All those bottles and bottles of tears.  
*Blessed are those who mourn,*  
*for they will be comforted,*  
by a God who is close enough  
to catch your tears in his bottle.