

Many of us are aware of the baby shampoo that uses the slogan, “No More Tears”. And understandably, it’s a good slogan to have because no one wants their infant or child to have stinging and watery eyes during bath time.

But maybe we need a shampoo that says, “More Tears, Please”. It would certainly not be a marketable slogan, but it might communicate to our world that tears might not always be a bad thing.

It seems that many of us grew up with the message that tears are a bad thing, that they’re a sign of weakness. If you are male, it was that you were a ‘sissy’ and you were seen as less of a male if you cried.

There are a lot of people who have been programmed to be ashamed of their own tears and they may feel uncomfortable when others cry.

Did you know that there are 697 references to tears and crying in the Bible? One of the first references to tears is in the book of Genesis when Abraham wept over the death of Sarah. Hannah wept before the Lord in her struggle to have a child. Esau wept over his father Isaac. King David writes very often in the Psalms about weeping before God, even saying that they were a regular part of his day.

There are many references to tears of grief in the Bible as well. The shortest verse in the Bible is this, “Jesus wept” and it is recorded at the death of Lazarus, Jesus’ friend.

Others wept tears of repentance and guilt, such as the nation of Israel weeping over their lost ways and inability to follow God’s direction. Jeremiah was called the Weeping Prophet and is attributed to writing the book of Lamentations in the Bible, which is a beautiful book filled with the emotions of grief and sorrow and then hope.

Others in the Bible wept tears of joy. In Genesis Joseph wept tears of joy when he was reunited with his brothers in Egypt.

So we know that the Bible is filled with stories of tears in all forms. But what are tears, exactly? The chemist will tell us that a tear is a solution of sodium chloride and calcium, along with a few other chemicals to make up the solution.

Physiologists will tell us that a tear is a lubricating fluid of the eyeball secreted from glands and poured over the eyes to keep them from becoming dry.

Maybe some would tell us that tears are a sign of cowardice.

But maybe, above all other definitions, tears are a holy and healthy expression of emotion. Tears have far more to do with the soul than they do with the physical body.

Tears are the liquid form of prayer.

And there are so many reasons why we cry:

Tears of grief and sorrow. We know there are many kinds of grief. Grief when we lose a loved one in death. Grief over a lost opportunity or a significant change in life plans. Grief over growing older and losing independence.

We cry tears of fear and worry. When we are worried about a medical test or outcome. When we are worried about someone that is close to us who is struggling with decisions in life. Worry about things that we cannot control but wish we could.

We cry tears of confusion. When our lives just don't make sense and when we aren't sure where we're being led. When we think we've been following where God is leading us and it turns out not to be even close. When our perspective on the world is shattered and we're left feeling alone and confused.

We cry tears of being overwhelmed or stressed out. Too many demands on time. Too many things to juggle, too many people placing expectations on us and not being able to say no.

We cry tears of empathy and sympathy and compassion. Personally, I believe these are the tears that connect us to other people in a way that expresses more than words ever could. When

we are so moved with compassion for another's sorrow that we let our tears do the talking. Because sometimes there are no words. Sometimes there are only tears, and that's okay.

We cry tears of surprise and joy and hope. When the news we wanted to hear is even better. When God works in us and we experience an overwhelming joy simply to be alive and in God's world. One of my favorite quotes comes from an artist by the name of Brian Andreas who writes in one of his pieces, "She said she usually cried at least once each day not because she was sad, but because the world was so beautiful and life was so short."

And we cry tears of laughter. Have you ever laughed so hard that you cried? I will never forget when this happened to me, at probably the most inappropriate time. I was in seminary and had just completed an intense week at a conference where we were placed in small groups for eight hours a day and were continually challenged to see how what we said and did affected each member of the group.

It was an emotionally exhausting week and this inappropriate moment happened when we were at the closing worship, right before we left for home. We were all gathered together and I was with my two closest friends sitting near the front row. I noticed in the bulletin that there was a typo for one of the songs. Instead of it saying, "Go my children with my blessing, you are my own"; instead it said, "Go my children with my blessing, you are ME own." Under normal circumstances it wouldn't have been that

funny. But in the exhausted state that we were in, anything would have seemed funny.

So I leaned over and pointed out the error to my two friends and said, “Look, we’re singing the Irish version!” And immediately they burst out in silent fits of laughter, and I joined in. And it was the kind of laughter where your shoulders shake and where you’re afraid you’re going to lose control of your bladder.

And it happened when we were supposed to be in silent reflection. Imagine what we did when we actually sang the song. I almost had to leave the room, but we were eventually able to pull it together enough to make it through the rest of the service. But those were good tears that day and it was great laughter.

And so it is apparent that there are many reasons why we shed tears.

But know this. Every tear that we cry, no matter if they are tears of sorrow or tears of joy, those tears are held. They are held in the hands of God and God knows you’re crying.

Remember that Jesus cried, too. For so many reasons. We have a savior who experienced emotion and we have a savior that holds every tear that falls from our eye. We never cry alone.

But we are also reminded in our reading from Revelation, that one day our tears will be no more. We will be brought into eternal glory

where there will be no more pain, no more sorrow and God will wipe away every tear from our eye forever.

But that's not yet for us who are still living. We still live with tears.

And we can be attentive and patient with those who shed tears. We can allow others to cry, to express those liquid forms of prayer, and know that it is okay for them to do so.

Maybe that's part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to allow and embrace the tears of others and if the situation calls for it, to act on those tears.

When someone weeps because they have no home to go to. When someone cries because there isn't enough food for them to feed their families. When someone weeps because they have no one who will weep with them. When a child cries because his or her parent has been imprisoned. Sometimes the tears of others can lead us to act, to help change a system or cruel injustice.

And also know that when you come to church, it's okay to cry here. I know that there are people who avoid coming to church because they are afraid that they are going to cry. But it's okay to cry here. People cry in church. Every week! Sometimes for reasons we're aware of and sometimes for no apparent reason at all.

But lots of us cry when we come home to God's house.

This is a sacred space, and this is a community where tears will not only be held by God, but also, if you're comfortable with it, in the loving hands of the people who sit in the pews next to you.

So maybe we do need a new slogan for that baby shampoo. Maybe we could market some kind of product that reminds us that tears are holy and that they are prayers that we sometimes can't put into words.

May you leave here this morning knowing that your tears are holy. That your tears are okay. And that your tears are held by God. Amen.