

“Grieving Together, Growing Together”

Rev. Adam Hange — November 2, 2025

John 11:32–37

A few weeks ago, we gathered at my wife’s family home to celebrate what would have been her grandfather’s 100th birthday.

Over a huge meal of pasta and meatballs — his favorite — we remembered his smile, his laugh, and that mischievous sparkle in his eyes. How he sometimes cheated at cards just to see if he could get away with it!

Around the table, we felt a mix of emotions. He’d lived a long, full, wonderful life, and there was some relief in knowing he was free from the aches and pains of age. He was dearly loved by his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren — and dearly missed.

He passed on October 25th of last year, just before All Saints Day. It was extra tender last year. In truth, every year this day is tender for someone. Grief doesn’t keep a calendar. And every year, on All Saints Day, we ring the bell and remember the one for whom the bell tolls.

All Saints is one of those rare days in the church year when we make sure there are enough tissues on hand. It can be vulnerable to enter a space like this, knowing you might end up in tears. Some of us don’t like crying in public. Some of us take pride in never letting anyone see our tears. We prefer to “keep a stiff upper lip,” or “stay on the sunny side.”

That's why I'm grateful that once a year we gather intentionally to make space for collective grief. Because when we grieve together, we grow together.

We gather not just to remember those we've lost, but to remember how love continues to grow through our remembering. Our tears are often a mix of gratitude and sorrow, thanksgiving and ache.

It's been said that each of us dies twice — once when we take our last breath, and again the last time someone speaks our name. Today we remember, so that the second death never comes too soon.

Jesus Wept with Them

Our reading from John's Gospel tells a story of grief observed. The brother of Jesus' dear friends, Mary and Martha, has died.

Mary — the same Mary who once washed Jesus' feet with her tears — now kneels before him again, heartbroken.

"Lord, if you had been here," she says, "my brother would not have died."

You can imagine what Jesus might have said: "He's in a better place." "At least he's not suffering." "Look on the bright side — you still have your sister."

But Jesus says none of these things. Instead, he asks gently, “Where have they laid him?” He goes with them to the tomb, and there — surrounded by mourners — he is deeply moved.

And then it says, “Jesus wept.”

Two words that tell us everything we need to know about the heart of God.

I don’t imagine these were quiet, composed tears. I imagine they were real, raw, shoulder-shaking sobs — the kind that leave you emptied and alive all at once. The kind that remind us that Jesus was fully human, “in every way as we are.”

It wasn’t until they stood together in shared grief that the tears began to flow.

The Power of Shared Grief

What happens when we decide not to grieve alone, but together? When we make space for shared sorrow and sacred remembrance?

In Jesus’ time, grief was not private — it was communal, embodied, public. Neighbors gathered, prayers were spoken, and meals shared. Even professional mourners were part of the custom — not to dramatize grief, but to ensure no one mourned alone.

The Jewish tradition of sitting shiva still embodies this truth. For seven days,

friends and family come, bringing food, prayers, and quiet presence. They don't come to fix the pain — they simply sit and accompany you through it.

How different that is from our culture, where people often feel pressure to “move on” or “stay strong.” The Gospel invites us to something more honest — to lament together as a spiritual practice, to let presence itself become part of the healing.

When we grieve together, we remember we are not alone. When we cry together, we make room for love to grow again.

Rituals of Remembering

Human beings across every culture have created rituals to hold what words cannot.

In many Mexican and Latin American communities, families create ofrendas for Día de los Muertos — altars with photos, candles, marigolds, and favorite foods of loved ones. Despite the skulls and skeletons, it's not morbid — it's a celebration of connection, a way of saying: they are still with us, still part of our story.

When we light candles for the saints or place photos on our communion table, we're doing something very similar — different culture, same longing, same declaration: love outlasts death.

Many of us have our own quiet rituals — visiting a gravesite on a birthday or anniversary, bringing flowers, saying a prayer, whispering a name to the wind. These moments don't trap us in sadness; they help us carry our grief with grace.

And in our public life, we see new memorials rising — ghost bikes painted white where cyclists have died, roadside crosses and ribbons tied to fences. These are modern altars, where personal grief meets public witness.

They say: This life mattered. This story is not forgotten. There is love here.

Rituals of remembrance — ancient or improvised — are how we embody faith and hope in the face of loss.

The Growth That Comes from Grieving Together

Jesus' tears are not the end of the story; they are the doorway to resurrection. Before new life emerges, grief must be honored.

Shared mourning becomes the soil where compassion, empathy, and justice take root.

At our Bible study, we reflected on how funeral traditions have changed, and how it's less common for families to bring children to such services. Yet many of us remembered how formative that experience was — learning how to show up for others in times of loss.

Communities that grieve together also learn to act together — to feed the hungry, comfort the lonely, welcome the stranger. Every meal we share, every garden we tend, every person we welcome is an act of resurrection planted in the soil of compassion.

And when we gather for prayer vigils, we make space for collective lament — often followed by a call to deeper engagement.

Scripture promises that one day God will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4). Notice — it doesn't say there will be no tears, but that we won't face them alone. Our calling as the Body of Christ is to help one another experience that promise here and now.

Closing

Maybe today you bring your own tears — for someone you've loved and lost, for pain in your family, or for the suffering of the world. Know this: you do not weep alone. The same Christ who wept with Mary and Martha weeps with you.

Our tears are prayers that need no words. They water the soil of our souls where compassion grows.

So light a candle. Visit the gravesite. Cook their favorite meal. Tell the stories again. These are holy acts — ways of remembering that love never dies.

Every time we gather at this table, every time we remember the saints, every time we hold space for one another's pain — resurrection takes root again.

May our tears water new life.

May our remembering deepen love.

May our grieving together help us grow together — until all things are made new.

Amen.