



Greetings!

Please read [John 11: 1-44](#)

The passage above reminds us of Jesus. Jesus was in touch with his emotions. Roy M. Oswald and Arland Jacobs took on this subject in their recent book [The Emotional Intelligence of Jesus: Relational Smarts for Religious Leaders](#). In this book they discuss Jesus's style in the school of emotional intelligence based on the accounts found in the four Gospels. Together, the authors explore further by exegeting multiple texts of Jesus and his emotions.

Here are a few:

Compassion and Mercy – [Mark 6:34](#), [8:2](#), [Matthew 5:7](#)

Distressed, Agitated and Grieved – [Mark 14: 32-34](#)

He Wept – [John 11:35](#), [Luke 19:41](#)

Love – [Mark 10:21](#), [John 11:5](#), [John 11:36](#), [John 19:26](#), [20:2](#), [21:7](#), [20](#)

In these brief passages we get a glimpse of the emotional make up of Jesus. He deeply cared for those around him - his disciples, the people of the towns and villages where he preached and healed. Jesus engaged in ministry with people all around him and yet through his personal use of his emotions, brought a dimension of what fullness of life might look like.

At the heart of Jesus' ministry was his willingness to be vulnerable before others. In the text for today, Jesus is broken by the death of his friend. At first he is silent and others around Him fill the silence because – silence is unsettling. And when Jesus cries at the tomb of Lazarus we are invited into the reality of His raw emotion.

Many of us in the Ohio River Valley District are feeling raw emotion this week because our friend and colleague, The Rev. Deacon Benji Sayre, was in a terrible automobile accident. Benji is very much alive but has suffered traumatic brain injuries also known as TBIs. Benji's healing will be long, perhaps months or years, and he will

never be the same. We are all drawing on the deep reservoirs of our emotions to get through individually and corporately. When I first received the news of the accident from David Meredith I was shocked. We sobbed, cried and prayed together. Just the day before Benji was leading a formation retreat for ordinands in the Annual Conference, you know in his usual style – fun and filled with laughter. At the hospital that night, the few gathered there told stories and prepared for the worst, but the tears and laughter sustained us. Benji was my first visitor at the Reading Road district office and I remembered that in the middle of that night. It made me smile. We were able to go home at 3 a.m. on Monday morning as we prepared for a new dawn. We do that every day and so must you.

There was a dawn on the other side of Jesus' pain too. John 11:35 is a short verse but in its larger context gives credence that being in touch with our emotions is a Christian thing to do. Injury, accidents and recovery are emotional experiences. We must resist the cultural tendencies to dismiss our emotional needs in the midst of a crisis. Any change in a person's life or circumstance is complex and emotional and may lead to a process of grief. Grief is the process of emotionally embracing what we are going through. It is not easy. But we are not alone. We have each other. In addition, the Prophet Isaiah in an earlier era proclaimed that the hoped-for Messiah would "know our griefs" and "carry our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4) While this passage and its larger context of Jesus and Lazarus is not a parallel to Benji's situation, this story gives us a healthy view to be in touch with our emotions in the style of Jesus.

Already a number of churches are doing much for Benji and the Sayre family – from prayer vigils to food trains. Excellent pastoral care has been offered by the Clifton Church and others, including their Sr. Pastor, The Rev. David W. Meredith, and the Rev. Robert English, Chair of the Board of the Wesley Foundation. Colleagues are posting positive messages in social media and offering all sorts of help. But in the midst of "giving voice" and "doing" we also must make way for the silences. Silences should be honored, for they are healing moments too. We should resist filling them.

The entire John 11: 1-44 passage can be read in such a way that honors the presumed silences of the moment. If you skip the silences it only takes about two seconds to read John 11:35. It goes by so quickly! The shortest verse, in all of the scripture, took a long time to unfold. We know better! Have you ever had a good two second cry? Not me! Seconds of reflection and emotion seem very inadequate for someone we love. And Jesus loves Lazarus – the scripture tells us so! Lazarus is important to everyone in the passage. In the story, they give themselves permission to be in touch with what they are feeling. They all weep together.

In the coming days, as you contemplate and pray for Benji, his wife Molly, and their children Clark and Annie Kate – and the shifts of caregivers at the hospital – I remind you to honor your feelings. Be in touch with your emotions. Embrace the silences and the mystery that the Holy One is in your midst.

And if this time has brought up some past griefs, that you need to address, I encourage you to find a safe person and a safe place to release them.

We are community!

We are here for each other!

May it Be So!

Closing prayer from Rev. Robert English, posted on Clifton UMC Facebook April 24 following some good news from the hospital:

God of love, we give you thanks for this news as we continue to uplift your servant Benji and pray for your continued healing. We are grateful for all the love and care of gifted medical workers guided by your wisdom and presence. Be with Molly, Clark and Annie Kate and all who love Benji in this moment of hope. In the name of Jesus, your hope and love incarnate. Amen.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
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