

“Gratitude for Life”

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A couple of weeks ago, I was hopping mad watching football. Now, I get hopping mad whenever my Vikings play, because they let me down on a regular basis. [Laughter.] But this particular week, I was watching a particular game and I didn't have a horse in the race - and I know, it was the Oakland Raiders and I think the Los Angeles Rams. They [the Rams] were just pummeling those Raiders. If you don't keep up with football (and most of the time I'm really happy about this), the Raiders really stink this year. And, they just got pounded by the Rams, who have an amazing defensive line and a couple of very quick linebackers.

They are just pummeling the Raiders' quarterback - whose name is Derek Carr. Derek Carr is a great guy and he was really surprising, after the draft, at how well he has played as a rotten Oakland Raider.

He dropped back, almost to his own goal line, and the Rams just went after him. I swear, the entire Oakland Raider line was bull fighting, saying “Ole!” [laughter] just so the Rams could run through and get a really good shot on their quarterback. They did.

I think his last name is Donald. I think he went in and hit him. I wish they had a machine that could tell the amount of power that walloped the quarterback in that moment. Now Donald is over 300 pounds and he runs a 4.4.40. That means he is fast. And, you put that much speed and that much girth into one hit and, I swear, they were going to knock the helmet right off of his head.

He went down. And, in that moment, because it was so close to the goal line, they had a camera that zoomed in on Derek Carr's face. Now, that is cruel. Now, the guy just got packed. None of the rest of us would even be able to get up, let alone turn around and smile for the camera.

Somebody made the comment, as he was getting up, that it looked like there was a bit of a tear in his eye. Now, I thought, if I got popped that hard, there would be more than a tear in my eye. As the game went on, they made fun of him for it. Now, by the next day, ESPN was making so much fun of this guy, because after being walloped like that [he] seemed to have a wet eye. They called it “The Crying Game.”

They started making fun of him and then, all of sudden, other quarterbacks like Ben Roethlisberger, of the Steelers, stepped in to say, “Hey, anybody that gets hit that hard is going to tear up a little bit. You can't imagine what it's like.”

But, then they continued. Another ESPN group of guys were getting on there [the television] and saying, “I would never play with a cry baby on the field.”

Now, here is Derek Carr. He is not a little boy. He stands probably 6'3" or 6'4", and 220 or 230 pounds, but he is small in comparison to the guys who want to take his head off. He has played elementary ball, little league ball or whatever you call it when it's football. And, all

of the way through high school, he was one of the top recruits in the entire country, coming out of high school. He went and played for Fresno State University - so he played some of the best talent in the entire country in his years in college; was one of the top quarterbacks drafted in the NFL. Everybody wanted Derek Carr.

Why? I watched the draft. At our house the draft is the only three days where I am King of my House [laughter], and it also is the only three days that I really believe, in my heart of hearts, that the Vikings have a chance [laughter] - because everybody is tied in the draft; we are all zero and zero. So, I'm watching and I'm thinking, "I wish the Vikings could get Derek Carr, because we need a top quarterback that can take the hits, get up, and start throwing that ball again."

Here they are making fun of Derek Carr, because he happened to get a little tear in the corner of his eye, when he got hit by one of the biggest, meanest, fastest, toughest, and girthiest football players in the NFL. "And," I thought to myself, "how pathetic, when men are harassed for getting a tear in their eye, when they are walloped like that. No wonder the rest of society's men keep their mouths shut, [and] learn to suppress all of their pain, so that nobody ever thinks they can feel anything, because if there is one thing a man never wants to be called, it's 'weak.'"

The rest of that week, and even this past week, Derek Carr would get up, and he would say, "I didn't get a tear in my eye. I wasn't crying. You go back and you look." It was so pathetic that he had to defend himself.

Me? I would have said, "You bet I cried, and you would have done it worse, if you got hit by him." But he had to defend his *honor*, so that no one would think he was weak; so that his own players wouldn't walk off the field and no longer be willing to play with him. That is tough.

As I was thinking about that and stewing on it and getting mad, wouldn't you know, this was the week that Jesus is talking about tearing up and weeping at the grave of Lazarus?

Now, I went back and I looked, trying to find an article [to support my feelings], and I found one in Psychology Today magazine by a Dr. Barbara Markway. And Dr. Markway said that we, as a society, have done this to men, and we have made men dysfunctional because we have tried to make them the "feeling-less" gender. It is often women's fault as [much as] men's, because when men try to explain their feelings, they get walloped because they are not doing it properly, so they must feel inappropriately. Then, when they do try to explain or get emotional [then they are told], "Well, you are just weak."

She goes on to explain that men can't win, because they don't know how, because they have been told to suppress their feelings - their emotions - and, then, when they try to explain them, they are ill-equipped, because they are told to not be over-sensitive and not to cry; so they don't know how to get it out.

She said, worse than that, men will get their feelings out; all of us do. So, we have to find a different way. Well, if we aren't going to cry it out; we are going to scream it out. If we aren't going to cry it out; we are going to anger our feelings out. You've got to get them out somehow.

Sometimes when it's really bad, to get it out we even resort to violence, because it is the only way that it is acceptable. Men can't cry but, by golly, we can get angry. Men can't cry, but they can fight - that's what we are taught when we're in elementary or middle school. It makes you tough. Then it's not that far a cry to becoming an adult and acting out all of that emotion you just have to get rid of. And, if not anger, that's a small step to violence.

I think she is right.

Now, that takes you back to Jesus. Jesus did a whole lot of things that were not written in our Bible. He had years between the ages of 12 and 30 that Jesus did all of this stuff, and it's never mentioned at all in the Gospels. And, even in the Gospels - think about what you do in a year or two-year period-of-time - and look at how little we know of what Jesus did. So for them, the writers of the Bible - those who were eye-witnesses - who tell the stories that finally got to the writer, very few things were remembered. Only the "really big" stuff, the "important" stuff, the "WOW" stuff got remembered. And, what is one of those WOW moments? Jesus weeping.

Now, Dr. Markway said, part of the reason why men are not capable or allowed to emote - especially with tears - is because we are in a society that is too macho. We try to separate man's strength from women's vulnerability, and both of it is a bunch of hog wash - because women are far stronger than society often gives them credit for - and men need to stop pretending that they are the Almighty themselves, and show a little more weakness and bring that together.

Now, that is our society. Think about how much more vast that chasm is between our society now and what it was like 2000 years ago, where women couldn't speak around men, where women sat in a different place of worship, because they were not good enough, or smart enough, or faithful enough, to be with the men in worship.

How much greater was that chasm? How much more macho were the men? How much stronger and powerful, and much more was required of them that they not show emotion - especially tears?

No wonder this was written down in Scripture, because Jesus showed himself to be incredibly weak, and how could they follow a Prophet who was that weak? And later, after he hung on that cross, how could they follow and believe in a man who claimed to be or who people claimed he was both totally human and totally Divine? How could he be that Divine, if he was weak enough to cry? We can't even put up with it from a football player - how can we put up with it from God?

Now, I would argue that Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. Jesus was having a teachable moment, because he knew that if you do not get control of your emotions and handle them properly, there will be anger which will lead to violence. Tears are a gift that lets it out - that frees us from all of that emotion.

Ask somebody who sobbed one time, how much better they felt to get it out. There are many men who have never done that once in their entire lives and, if they could just do that, it would wipe away so much anger, so much angst, so much violence, and Jesus would say,

“the way you mourn in a healthy way, to not just get beyond it, but get *through* it, is the gift of knowing how and when to weep. How to handle those emotions in a way that lets them go, so that you don’t have to resort to the anger, the violence, and the angst, which throws people away - casts them aside – and, in that moment, Jesus taught us all how to mourn, how to grieve and how to be open to life anew.”

This is not just a story about the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus went ahead and died some time later. They were not celebrating a resurrection like Jesus, because Jesus ascended. Jesus went to heaven. He died and was resurrected. The whole emphasis of this passage is not on Lazarus - it’s on a weeping Jesus, and the Apostle Paul understood it, for in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, he says: *My grace is sufficient for you and you will find my power in my weakness.*

Don’t be afraid to be weak, to mourn and to cry. Be afraid not to, because when you don’t let it out that way, you will let it out another way, and that will pull you away from people and it will hurt others, as our anger and our violence often does. Trust. Trust enough to let it out, so that you can receive the Spirit back in. Jesus taught us that and, if Jesus can do it, so can you and I.

Amen.