

KMarie Tejada: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

KMarie Tejada: Welcome to morning prayers. If you'll please stand as you're able and join me in our responsive reading, which this morning is Psalm 165, from your Appleton Chapel Psalter book on page 84. This is my prayer to you, oh God. Strike at the root of poverty in my own heart.

Congregation: Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

KMarie Tejada: Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Congregation: Give me the strength to never disown the poor or bend my knee before insolent might.

KMarie Tejada: Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

Congregation: And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

Congregation: (singing)

Pat McLeod: Good morning and thank you choir. That was so beautiful. Have you ever suffered? Have you ever truly mourned? A conference attendee pelted me with those two questions after I finished speaking on the scripture blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Judging from the non-verbals, he wasn't asking a question. He was making a statement. He had no interest in having someone who had never really suffered lecture him about mourning. "No, not really." I confessed. He shook his head disapprovingly and said, "That's what I thought. He was probably right. I was in no position to talk about the blessing sacredness of mourning. I had never really mourned.

Pat McLeod: That is until the day I received the dreaded call. The call then informed me that my 16 year old son Zach had been injured and was being airlifted to a hospital to undergo emergency brain surgery. Zach survived the surgery that night and the four that followed, but a significant portion of his brain did not. The privileged life that had insulated me from suffering and mourning ended that day. And my first experiential understanding of what Jesus meant by blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted, began. Today I can stand before you and honestly say that three of the most profound encounters with the living God in my life occurred in moments of intense mourning. One of those happened a week after Zach's injury. Our daughter Chelsea had left for her first year of college a week or two weeks before Zach's accident. We waited until Zach awoke from his medically induced coma to have her come home.

Pat McLeod: From the moment that I saw her standing curbside at the Logan Airport to the moment I saw her eyes well up with tears when stood bedside with her best

friend Zach, I sensed a fomenting sorrow brewing inside of me, a force more and more difficult to contain. I held it. I held it in through the morning visit, barely. But when we left the hospital and drove to a nearby restaurant for lunch, I dropped Chelsea and Tammy at the door and went in search for a parking place. The moment they got out of the car and shut the door, I began to weep.

Pat McLeod: I more than wept. I sobbed uncontrollably. For the first time in my life I wailed and moaned in emotional anguish. It was as if observing Chelsea's deep sadness gave me permission to feel my own. I surrendered to an uncontainable sorrow. That eruption of emotion, which is more intense than anything that I had ever experienced, was in many ways predictable. I felt it come in as a series of circumstances unfolded during that week. But in the few short moments that followed when I finally gave mourning a space to breathe, I was caught by surprise by the emotion that accompanied and enveloped my wailing. Indescribable and in that instance it became clear later that day. It was actually that evening at Zach's school that they were holding a prayer vigil. After singing two of Zach's favorite worship songs and offering a moment of silence prayer, one of Zach's teammates shared a brief tribute to my son Zach.

Pat McLeod: He told a story of sitting next to him on a bus ride. Zach had fallen asleep while he was reading his Bible. Noticing that Zach's Bible was about to slide off his lap and onto the floor, Michael grabbed and began to read what Zach was reading. Matthew chapter five verse four. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. The moment that he read that passage, a light went on inside of me and compelled me to offer a few closing comments to the crowd that had gathered that evening. Ironically I reiterated many of the exact same words that I had said nearly eight years earlier at the conference where I had been confronted by the you're-no-mourning-expert compere. I admitted that I had always found it strange that Jesus would espouse such an obvious oxymoron. In essence, he said, "How happy are those who are sad." I confessed that I had a lot still to learn about what Jesus might have meant by those words, but one thing I knew he didn't mean was that grief and sorrow and loss are not real and are not excruciatingly painful.

Pat McLeod: I added that I had never felt such an overwhelming sadness as I'd felt earlier that day. Clearly blessed are those who mourn does not mean we are happy in our sorrow because our sorrows, losses, pains or sadnesses are not real or deeply felt. They are. But what followed my eruption of sorrow in the car was this deep and almost indescribable feeling of consolation. It came from the realization that I was in the presence of a crucified God, that my pain was pulling me into a story that was greater than our own small story of tragedy. It's a story of a father who had endured the suffering of his own son. A father who felt, who understood, who could sympathize with and comfort me in my pain.

Pat McLeod: Join me in prayer, please. God, I thank you that you are a crucified God. That you understand, not only do you understand and sympathize with our pain, but you've come into the world to save us from it. And we now pray the words that

your son taught us to pray, saying, "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.