



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

On Being Family

SCRIPTURE:
John 11:28-36

August 13, 2023 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The Pixar film, “Inside Out,” follows Riley, who is born and raised in Minnesota. At Riley’s birth, we meet five emotions that shape her life: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger. We all carry these emotions in us—children, youth, young adults, adults—all of us. We also come to understand that our lives are shaped by core memories. In the movie, each memory is the shape of a ball and the color of each one represents how we were feeling at that time. Gold for joy, blue for sadness, purple for fear, green for disgust, and red for anger. In the opening of the film, we meet Riley and her emotions. [movie clip shown]

So, Riley grows up. She loves playing hockey and being outdoors and develops great friendships, all while being raised by two loving parents. And while all of the emotions play a part in Riley’s life, joy seems to be the most prevalent. Joy wants to protect Riley from feeling any of the other emotions. And I would want that for all of you but the truth is that is not how life works. We have other emotions for a reason. We do not feel joy all the time.

In her early adolescence, Riley’s world is changed dramatically as the family moves to the city of San Francisco for her Dad’s job. Nothing could be more different than the outdoor life she enjoyed in Minnesota than moving to this urban center. Suddenly, everything she knew is different and it is all happening during a crucial time when she is growing up: her early teenage years.

This leads to a change in her emotions. At one moment, Joy and Sadness find themselves locked out of their ability to shape Riley’s core memories and only Disgust, Fear, and Anger are left. If you don’t have the capacity for joy or sadness, whatever the situation—only disgust, fear and anger—well, you can see that is going to be a problem. In this scene, we see how Riley’s mom and dad deal with their own

emotions when Riley responds with only fear, disgust and anger. [second movie clip shown]

You can imagine things are not going to go well if the only emotions you have available to you are fear, disgust and anger. We need all of our emotions, including joy and sadness, to be family together.

That’s what is happening in today’s scripture. In his ministry, Jesus has come to love Lazarus and Martha and Mary, a brother and two sisters. They have become family to him. So, when he hears word that Lazarus is ill and sisters Mary and Martha ask him to come right away, he delays before starting out to see them, which is curious. By the time he comes near, Lazarus has died, and Martha meets Jesus on the road. Martha tells Jesus that if he had come right away, Lazarus would not have died. As a close friend of Jesus, Martha would have witnessed Jesus’ healing powers. In response to her statement, Jesus says one of his “I am” statements. He says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die.” Then he asks Martha if she believes this and she says she does. She is the first person in the gospel to make that faith claim.

Then Martha goes to tell her sister and Mary goes out to see Jesus. When she sees Jesus, she falls to Jesus’ feet and tells him the same thing as her sister, Martha. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus sees Mary who is weeping and the others who are with her and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says he was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” Other translations say Jesus was “deeply troubled.” Another says that Jesus “was deeply moved with tenderness and compassion.”

Then Jesus asks Mary where they have laid Lazarus’ body and she invites him to come and see and when he sees Mary weeping and the others who

are with her weeping, Jesus is moved to tears. There are only two places in the Bible where it says Jesus cried. This is one of them. The other is when Jesus makes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem and weeps as he sees the city.

I know we want to think that our core memories are only shaped by joy. But the truth is, sometimes our core memories are shaped by fear, disgust, anger and sadness. Those emotions are all part of who we are and they were part of Jesus, too.

When I was in college in Seattle, I worked part-time at an experimental school at the University of Washington. It was a school for severe and profound autistic elementary-age children. We were trying to teach them to communicate using sign language and any other means. I helped with kids who were 7-9 years old. None of them could put words together and we worked every day to help them communicate. One of my favorites was Curtis, a lanky, athletic 9-year-old who had the best, most infectious laugh. He liked being tickled and was always happy. He had a beautiful smile. He was the only child in the classroom who acknowledged us as teachers. When he saw me, his face would light up and he would come running and hug me—an extraordinary gesture for a severe and profound autistic child. We all loved Curtis.

So I was surprised one day when I came to the classroom and found him sad. He was sitting in the corner in the play area rocking gently with his arms over his head, just being sad. I got down on the floor, sat next to him, spoke to him and signed to him. No smile. I tried to tickle him a little—nothing. Then he began to cry these huge tears. I was sitting next to him and trying to understand why he was sad and he couldn't say and then our lead teacher, Becky, came

over and I asked Becky what was wrong with Curtis. She said, "Oh, Rodger. He's a 9-year-old little boy. And we know he gets all the signals you and I do, but somehow his beautiful brain gets them all jumbled up and he can't tell us what is happening or why. I think it's just tough to be an autistic little kid some days and he just needs to cry." Then Becky sat down next to him and invited Curtis to lean against her. She put her arm around him and stroked his beautiful hair and Curtis just cried and cried. "I just think it's tough to be a little kid some days and he just needs to cry."

So eventually Joy and Sadness find their way back to Riley. While Joy wants to take over and make everything happy again, Riley misses her old home and friends so much, she tries to run away and is on a bus out of town to find her way back to Minnesota on her own. And just at the right moment, Joy realizes that the best thing for Riley is to just let her be sad. This next clip shows how Sadness helps Riley grieve, tell her parents how she really feels and how her loving parents respond so beautifully. [movie clip shown]

When Jesus sees how Martha and Mary are grieving, he, too, weeps. He, too, is reduced to tears.

American author Washington Irving wrote, "There is a sacredness to tears. They are not the mark of weakness but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

Being family means there are times of joy and sadness, even disgust, fear, and anger. Jesus felt all those, too.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.