

Hardly a day goes by these days when I am not outraged by some newsfeed obscenity that offends my sense of right and wrong. One recent example is how the White House is using the federal shutdown to stop billions in approved funds for states that happen to be led by Democrats. What happened to the notion of the loyal opposition. But, I suppose the red states could point the finger back if they were so inclined, and they are.

So where do we go from here? I believe part of the answer lies in our gospel reading this morning. The context for the disciples asking Jesus to increase their faith is when Jesus has just finished telling them in verses 4 and 5, “if there is repentance, you must forgive. And he hastens to add, “If the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says I repent, you must forgive.” Hard to imagine, right? No surprise that the disciples thought more was better. At least they were being honest. That’s how we humans have thought and fought for what we think is ours for over 5 million years. If there was ever a collective insanity that characterizes us as a species, I think it would have to be that. Our perspective is **MORE IS BETTER!** Why because our perspective has also always been that there’s not enough to go around, so we better take care of us and ours first.

But Jesus responds with a riddle that he hopes will rattle their cages a bit. It’s not about **how much faith I have as much as it’s about what kind of faith I have**. Turns out a little bit of a different **kind of faith** the size of a mustard seed, about the same size as the tip of my ballpoint pen, where faith is more about trust and confidence than it is about a set of beliefs, that kind of faith can move mountains and transplant mulberry bushes to the middle of the ocean.¹

¹ To support this shift, Rohr makes several interrelated points:

1. **Faith as trust, not achievement**
 - Faith is not something we earn by moral performance or inner grit, but something we receive and live into.
 - It is more like confidence in a presence, rather than a measure of one’s own spiritual strength.
2. **Weakness, humility, and receptivity**
 - Because faith is not under our control, we often confront our limitations, doubts, and vulnerabilities.
 - Rohr implies that these are not obstacles but necessary “doors” through which deeper faith must pass.
 - In other words: real faith often grows in our weak places, not in our strong ones.
3. **God is already present / waiting**
 - The idea that God’s grace is already active, before we manage to “bring faith” to the table.

And if we add a little bit of humility to our daily walk as he recommends in the story of the unworthy slave, then we're starting to get rid of our obsessive need for narcissism, the notion that I am better than the next guy. We start to let go of our false sense of superiority and begin to realize that faith is not an achievement but a matter of trust. Faith is not something we earn by moral performance or inner grit, but something we receive and live into.

Sadly, we live in a time when outrage has become the currency of public life. And I suspect, we're gonna be here for awhile. Outrage is loud, performative, and contagious. It surges through our social feeds, fuels our politics, and seeps into our conversations. It promises clarity—"here is the villain, here is the blame"—but rarely delivers healing. In this environment, the simple act of weeping feels strangely out of place, even weak. Yet tears may be exactly what this age of outrage most needs.

But here is where The Tears of Things can have a healing effect on our self-centered lives if we let them. Tears don't lie. They are the body's truth-telling when words are not enough. The prophets are example of what Rohr thinks we need more of in today's world. Jeremiah, the so-called "weeping prophet," let his tears flow as a witness to the brokenness of his people. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. In those moments, tears spoke more

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- Our role is less to create faith than to open ourselves to it, to let God's presence support and transform us.
 - 4. **The role of patience and time ("radical resilience")**
 - Faith is not instantaneous or fully under our control; it is something that may grow slowly, sometimes with setbacks.
 - Rohr often speaks of "radical resilience" — staying with the process, enduring when we don't feel sure, continuing through the uncertainties.
 - Faith isn't always a dramatic leap, but a long walk of trust.
 - 5. **The danger of reducing faith to moralism or "trying harder"**
 - He warns that when faith becomes just another "task" or performance (like trying harder to pray, be holy, behave better), it loses its essential character.
 - This kind of faith is fragile and will fail us in times of crisis or dryness.
 - 6. **Faith and discipleship**
 - In the Luke passage, the "servant / master" metaphor: the disciple is not owed anything, but rather lives in radical trust and service.
 - Faith humbly accepts that relationship rather than demanding reward or assurance.

deeply than outrage ever could. They revealed love wounded by loss and hope struggling to survive amid ruin.

In this way, tears are prophetic because they cut through denial. Outrage often hides grief; it externalizes pain by turning it into blame. But tears admit the cost inwardly. They confess: *I am not untouched by this suffering. I am not above this loss.* They place us in the truth, **and the truth, however unbearable, is the only ground on which healing can begin.**

Tears are also a form of resistance. In a culture that rewards hardness, sarcasm, and cynicism, **to weep is to stay tender.** Prophets do not harden their hearts to survive; they keep them vulnerable. They risk the wound again and again. Tears resist the pressure to become indifferent, and **indifference, after all, is the real death of the soul.**

There is also solidarity in tears. Outrage shouts across barricades, but when we weep with one another, we affirm that **suffering belongs to no single tribe, no single ideology, no single camp.** Tears dissolve the “us versus them” that outrage depends on. To cry with is to recognize our shared humanity, the common wound that makes us kin. Or as President Obama expressed in his inaugural address: There are no red states, there are no blue states, there is the United States of America. My friends, as our old, ordered world crumbles, we will have to pass through a time of disorder. And, if there is going to be a fresh wind of reorder, and I hasten to add, we are way too early in the cycle of disorder to glibly jump there, but when we are ready, perhaps we will have to start there.

Finally, tears carry us forward. Outrage stops at destruction; it tears down but rarely builds up. Tears, however, are part of the passage from disorder to reordering. They wash away the illusions that sustained us in the old order, and they water the ground where something new might take root. In this way, they are prophetic: they not only name what is broken, they also anticipate what could be whole.

Tears, then, are not weakness. They are strength that refuses to masquerade as invulnerability. They are truth in a time of spin, tenderness in a time of hardness, solidarity in a time of division, and hope in a time of despair. They are prophetic wisdom because they call us out of outrage and into something deeper, something more human, something more divine.

Perhaps, in the end, tears are the Spirit's quiet rebellion against the shrillness of our age. They invite us to stop shouting long enough to feel, to grieve, to love again. And in that love, to glimpse the possibility of a world made new.

We've been spending time with the prophets of old for the last few weeks. Jeremiah and Amos invite us into a divine sadness about reality itself, much more than mere outrage at this or that event. **Habakkuk is another example.** In our reading this morning, he wonders out loud "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?" His lament lasts for most of the book until the very end when he proclaims, "...yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exalt in the God of my salvation." (Habakkuk 3:17)

Richard Rohr believes we need prophets like Jeremiah and Habakkuk in our time to call out the truth boldly but remember to do so with humility, detachment, and respect for those with whom we disagree.²

And to do so with tears. . .

Did you know that humans are the only mammals that shed tears in response to emotional states such as grief, empathy, joy, or frustration. So how does this work? You've heard me talk about the basic emotions at the base of the brain stem that have been with mammals for 160 million years. Yes, dogs whine when they are distressed, elephants trumpet softly at the death of one of theirs, and dolphins hold their dead calves at the surface for days so they can breathe even though they are already dead. But, humans cry. And with the tears, two other emotions, namely rage and panic/grief, work together by moving from attack to surrender, from a fight response to a mourning response. Rage says "Something should not be!" Grief says, "Something is. . .and I must let go."

²Marks of a True Prophet:

- **Humility and detachment.** Rohr says: *'They are humble enough to have detachment from their own opinion and status, because true prophets know the message is not theirs.'* The servant example in today's reading is someone who knows it's all in a day, no more no less but also knows they're part of something that is much bigger than whether or not the coffee is hot enough.
- **Respect for others.** They can still love and respect those who disagree.
- **Freedom from ambition.** Rohr warns: the moment you need fame or money for your message, you've already lost the truth. The prophet's reward is nothing except telling the truth.
- **Fruits of the Spirit.** St. Paul's list still stands: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The language then changes from anger at “sin” to empathy for suffering and woundedness. **Felt reality is invariably wept reality**, and wept reality turns outrage into compassion and kindness.

Sister Joan Chittister, a prophet in our time, closes her book, The Time is Now with this reflection: “What does a prophet do? A prophet cries out. . .without fear. . .without care for cost. . .Be not a whisper that is lost in the wind; be a voice that is heard above the storms of life.”

Amen!