The 10 Emotions Of Easter

What emotions filled the early disciples during Holy Week – and what can we learn from their feelings?

While I believe we need great *thinkers* in the world, we also need great *feelers* every bit as much. Being aware of our feelings simply means that we can weigh them, consider them, and learn from them – without getting lost in them. Every year we have the opportunity to empathize with the emotions of the early disciples – learning from their chaotic psychological journey – as they moved through Holy Week and the rollercoaster experience that we call Easter. How did they feel?

Getting In Touch With The Disciples' Emotions

We could learn a thing or two about ourselves by considering the disciples' *intense mental activity, and experiences of displeasure and pleasure* – also known as their *emotions* – from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. By imaginatively entering into the early disciples' possible emotions during their the Holy Week experience, we can find strength and resource to live into the fullness of our strange and beautiful Christian experience today.

While we can't know what those early Christians were feeling and thinking (emotion seems to be a cocktail of both), and certainly my words here will be conjecture at best, we can take a moment to suspend any disbelief we may have in the disciples' raw human experience (despite the miracles and love they witnessed) and do them the honor of imagining what it may have felt like to be in their shoes during those emotional days.
Here are few emotions and emotional words and (some will not fit exactly into the typical categories to which we assign emotions) I suggest may have been at play leading up to, and including, the Day of the Resurrection.

1. Elation & Joy

Elation and **joy** would be the words I would choose to describe the emotional tone of the early disciples' mornings, afternoons, and evenings during the years of Jesus ministry, leading up to Palm Sunday.
The mingling euphoria of hope, faith, delight, and amazement during those miraculous months would have supercharged their individual and corporate mood – even in the face of their complicated emotional lives under Roman rule.

Sensing that God's favor was with them would have marked their conversations in public and private. Add to this their anticipation of something "big" coming around the corner, and we have a recipe for goofy smiles, table laughter, overstated possibilities, and fantastical storytelling about the days to come.

2. Anticipation

Anticipation (fed by elation and spiced with a hint of anxiety?) would surely be a word to engage what Palm Sunday may have stirred in of the hearts of the earliest disciples. With Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and tables being turned as tensions mounted between Jesus and the authorities, the disciples would have been getting ready for that "something big" they had been talking about.

We can make an informed assumption that they would have perceived the greatest culmination to their hopes would be Jesus ushering in the fullness of that benevolent, healing, Shalom-infused Kingdom of God they had heard about since birth.

They could already feel His presence and power displacing the presence and power of the Roman empire within their hearts and minds!

This anticipation may have stirred in their hearts not only for Israel, but for the entire known world that would come to faith in Israel's God.

Imagine the Miracle Worker, the Raiser of Children, the Savior of Prostitutes, the ReNamer of the Outcast, the Wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords – sitting on a human throne in the here and now!

The best presidential promises of history would be easily dismissed in the light of this fresh vision heaven coming to earth in the person of Jesus – expelling chaos through the Shalom Government that rests on His shoulders (Is. 9:6).

Any piece of land, with that kind of King ruling, would truly become the *Promised Land* – the very Center of the World. The nations would stream to the Temple in that Holy City – the City of Shalom Peace – Jerusalem (Is. 2:2).

With the tensions mounting, one can only imagine the conversations over meals and in public places, ringing with revolution (the Romans and imperialized Jews-In-Favor didn't like that sound), of willingness to die for this new King to sit on the throne of leadership.

It might even be possible to think that the disdain of the haughty and compromised religious authorities would have been largely dismissed by those early disciples, knowing that their Sign-And-Wonder Sovereign would eventually put them in their place once and for all.

3. Terror

Terror would then be the word to describe what Maundy Thursday (Jesus began speaking unsettling words at the Last Supper, initiating some confusion and potentially fear) and Good Friday (when terror hits full force) would have stirred in their hearts.
The rumors of the capture, beating, and impending torture of Jesus would have precipitated the domino-falling of every hope in which they had so deeply invested over the last years.

Knowing that not only their Master, Champion, Sovereign, and Friend might now be crucified, but that they themselves might be alongside Him, would have been cause for sleepless nights, sleep-deprived days (inviting depression, anxiety, and extreme experiences of what might otherwise be normal emotions), and whispers of hiding places found and distances ready to be traveled.

4. Despair

Despair would be the overriding emotion of Good Friday. The mock trial of Jesus, and the turning of the crowds' favor away from their Lord (and themselves), would have left every disciple in a state of complete hopelessness.

While they may have retained small shreds of hope during the changing of the tides of public opinion, the crucifixion would have potentially had disciples vomiting from unrelenting stress, shaking uncontrollably, and expecting their own demise in the following week. Arrangements for spouses and children might be in process as hope quickly drained from their spirits.

Sure, their attention would be on Jesus, but their secondary (or primary) attention would be on themselves, their extended families, and those whom they had come to love and with whom they shared such life-altering experiences.

5. Bewilderment

Despair coupled with **bewilderment** would have been the tone of Holy Saturday. While terror and despair would continue to slither through their souls, for some disciples there may have been moments of pure, rational cognitive dissonance – as their human brains fired on all cylinders to figure out such a horror could be happening given all the miracles they had seen and promises they had believed.
Surely, if Jesus could raise a little girl from the dead, He could have power-played Himself out of such a brutal, horrific crucifixion!

After all, He had confirmed His identity and God's promises by signs and wonders (Mark 16:20)! The crucifixion was now the complete opposite of a sign and wonder! Where was the God in whom they had come to have so much faith the morning after Jesus breathed his last?
Forsaken might be another word to describe the emotions of that strange Saturday so long ago. The feeling of being left alone, abandoned, isolated, rejected, and dejected surely must have rolled like a wave over the hearts of even these faith-filled early followers.

6. Hopefulness & Trust

Hopefulness and **trust**, on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, are emotions and resolves probably only experienced by the women. There is something about the wild faith of women that is almost embarrassing to men in certain situations. I can just imagine some of the women speaking words of hope while the men stared at the wall, dumbfounded and thinking "These girls have lost their minds."
And because women are good at remembering things, only the women may have remembered what Jesus said about the temple being torn down and raised again in three days.

But maybe I'm not giving enough credit to the men with my tongue-in-cheek comments. I'm sure that at least a few of us had the faith of a mustard seed back then, too.

Having said all of this, and while indeed the disciples must have experienced emotions like these, we should also be confident that many of these men and women had actually emotionally matured across the years of their journey with Jesus.

Faith may have been much stronger behind the locked doors of homes during those painful days that I am suggesting. But if we take Peter as our example, I am most probably on some solid ground with my imagined scenarios.

7. Shock And Awe

Shock and **awe** are the first two words that come to mind for what Easter Sunday's news would have meant to those early disciples.
They were preparing to hide, run, or faithfully face their martyrdom at the hands of the the Holy Roman Empire and the Empire-Loyal Jews.

Good news, even if it is initially baffling, confusing, and incredible, somehow has a much higher emotional impact on us when it has followed a season of the worst news that one could imagine.

Think about the absolute worst news that you could imagine coming into your own life right now. Then imagine that after two days of intense grief and sorrow, news that is equal and opposite in its promise has been delivered to your ears by a credible source!

Laughter, tears, disbelief, unbelief, hope, joy, hesitation, ecstasy, euphoria! Sheer emotional chaos would all meet together in your soul like a spiritual storm front, cold and warm fronts all stirring up a psychological tsunami within.

Your mood and mine might bounce around so rapidly we may need medication just to remain coherent and finish sentences! Our minds would be electric with a thousand memories and thoughts – both of possibilities and of the devastation that would follow this potential hoax that was holding all your attention as well as those who had been to the tomb.

As reports of sightings come in, your heart is now pounding with the anticipation that around any corner you might actually see Jesus again. And would He be as you knew Him, or would He be a ghost, an apparition, or a thing of horror to behold after his bloody crucifixion? A first-century zombie, perhaps, or something stranger?

But that's not what the woman said. She saw Jesus whole, and beautiful, and alive. (As someone has well said, without women preachers none of us would know about the resurrection today. So let's make some room, shall we?)

And then the day comes that you actually see Him.
Simple words fail us at this point, and other arts and sciences would need to be invoked to do this part justice.

8. Love

Love infused with gratefulness, awe, friendship, deep comradery, vindication, (and possibly more fear?) may have moved through their hearts during this season of time.
We can imagine disciples, upon seeing Jesus, bursting into tears uncontrollably for extended periods of time, overcome by the sheer breadth of emotion they had experienced for those days and were now experiencing.

We can imagine otherwise articulate people babbling to one another like excited children lost in play, smiling uncontrollably as they left Jesus' physical presence (and the presence of their precious friends) to do some of the chores they still had to do to keep life going for their families.

9. Fearlessness

Fearlessness – is there a better word to describe what we imaginatively see burning in the disciples' eyes following the resurrection? Is it possible that the nauseating, paralyzing fear of the authorities, in the face of God's greatest miracle through Jesus, had completely and utterly dissipated?
Many scholars would suggest that this is the only possible explanation that historians could reasonably put forth for what happens next in the biblical account.

A force of human strength is unleashed from that day forward in the Church. And a ghost, a rumor, or a hopeful urban legend could not reasonably be the engine behind the next stage in the biblical plot.

With the innocence of delighted children sparkling in their eyes, even as continued threats and the great wall of unbelief from the Jews around them rose high, those early disciples would have been captivating to behold.

A holy bomb had gone off, and there is not enough groupthink in the world to power the engine of Kingdom activity that ensues.

Within days they are reground, retelling, and reframing the teaching and stories of Jesus. Eyewitness accounts are now everywhere and it would be hard to escape at least one of them from a credible witness in the communication village that was ancient Israel.

10. Empowerment

We could all say that the word **empowerment** carries with it an accompanying emotional state. When we are empowered, we feel any number of ideas taking on embodied residence within us.
Freedom. Authority. Clarity. Faith. Hope.

All of these words mark people who clearly feel empowered to live their life as it was meant to be lived.

When the Spirit is poured out as recorded in Acts 2, blowing like a mighty wind through that upper room, and the disciples begin healing and performing the same kinds of miracles that Jesus did with greater frequency and intensity – we can imagine how heady the times would have been.
And this morning, a few thousand years later, I hold the documents providing the same stories to us in my lap as I write this. And I am allowing the emotions to flood over me again as I take the time to empathize with the communal Journey of the Spirit that brings us to today – to Easter and its Holy Season of Celebration in the Church.

And for these 50 days of Easter I will remember those emotions and emotional states of mind and heart. I will welcome the Holy Spirit to stir them in me that I might launch into the world compelled by the same love (2 Cor. 5:14-15), the same joy, the same sense of hope and promise that the Spirit placed in the hearts of my earlier companions.
And I would invite you to join me in that long meditation on the resurrection of Jesus.

As I Write This

As I write this, today is Holy Saturday, and I am preparing to preach tomorrow to our local faith community. I feel the reality that the Spirit of He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead lives in me:

"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you."
Romans 8:11

As I feel this metaphysical reality, I also recognize that I have felt many of the same emotions expressed above. The disciples' experiences give us permission to feel the deep realities of being humans who live by faith.

And that same Spirit lives in you if you have welcomed Christ to rule and reign in your life. If the resurrection is true, then it is all true – your life can be made new, no one is beyond forgiveness and transformation, and the New Creation to come is as real as the view in front of you.

We are now commissioned to do the works of Christ in the world. The lavish presence and power of the Holy Spirit is our birthright (Ed Gentry), so shaking off the cynicisms and disconcerted, unsettled *zeitgeist* of our age, the Church rises from its grave with Christ to show up on death's territory.

The Easter Church & The Spirit Of New Creation

Let the empires and kingdoms of this world be put on notice; the Church of Jesus Christ is experiencing the resurrection all over again this year.

The same Spirit of love, power, and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7) is moving within us, healing us, enabling us to forgive and express compassion in the face of the greatest human challenges.
Hope is running or in our veins, and the breath of the Eternal Spirit is in our lungs. Or voice is growing stronger again, and our song is a melody not easily forgotten.

And this Spirit of New Creation, rekindled every time we see the wonder of the human heart transformed by God, and every time we worship and sing the songs that remind us that a day will come when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, is burning like a fire in the heart of the Church.

Let all things rise, and bless His Name!
The Easter spirituality of Christ's Church, inspirited and shaped by the Spirit of the New Creation at work within us – is a force to be reckoned with. +

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Question: What does this stir in you?

Resources:
From me, A Well-Worn Path: 31 Devotionals For The Worshipping Heart (with David C. Cook) for a 31-day devotional to be used through the Easter season (eBook only). Also available for download on WorshipTraining with a premium membership.

Vineyard Resources' The Holy Spirit & Easter, for a powerful reflection on the Holy Spirit's presence throughout the Easter story.