

Easter Sunday 2015 – April 5, 2015

I Tell You the Truth . . . Your Grief Will Turn to Joy

Text: John 16:16-22

¹⁶ "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." ¹⁷ Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." ¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" ²⁰ I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

On July 18, 1863, a Colorado private awoke in a jail cell. His future seemed grim. He would be shot to death by his fellow soldiers. He didn't know exactly when it would happen, but it would happen. He had been sentenced to death for deserting his regiment.

It had begun the year before as Private Delaney had been ordered to go and fight the confederates in New Mexico. He had begged his commanding officer to let him stay back and take care of his young wife. There was nothing that the officer could do. Private Delaney had taken an oath to serve his country. It was now time to serve his country. He joined his unit and began to march south. He quietly fell out of formation, and walked away. When they found him a few months later, there was a quick trial and he was sentenced to be shot. They put him in jail to await his execution.

Not much about Private Delaney is known. His military records don't record his birthdate. Nor do they record his wife's name or how many children he had. He hadn't even been that great of a soldier. On more than one occasion he had been found drunk by commanding officers. When he was court martialed for desertion, Denver newspapers didn't even report. In many ways, he was a nobody.

But then on July 1863, President Abraham Lincoln wrote the words that would change this man's life. Lincoln would sign a presidential pardon and write the words: *"Let him fight instead of being shot."* In a moment, he was freed from his past. Though he was guilty, he was now set free.

That was what Jesus was going to do for his disciples. When he speaks the words of our text, it was Maundy Thursday evening. In a little while, things were going to change. He would be betrayed, tried and sentenced to death. Unlike Private Delaney, Jesus was not guilty. He would give His life so that the guilty would be set free. Jesus knew what laid ahead of him. He knew that he would be forsaken by His own Father. But he also knew that in about 96 hours it would be all over. Sin would be paid. The guilty would be declared not guilty. He saw the pain of Good Friday, but he also saw the joy of Easter. He wanted his disciples to know that there would soon be grief in their lives. They were going to mourn his death. However, that grief would soon be turned to joy.

What has caused you grief this year? A loss of a job or a broken heart? Whose death do you mourn this year? What guilt has caused you to grieve this year? How many times have you worried this year? How many frustrations have you faced? The question today is not really if you grieve, but the question is how do you deal with it?

Jesus had an answer for his disciples. Just prior to saying they would weep, mourn, and grieve, he counsels, **"In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." Some of his disciples said to one another, 'What does he mean by saying, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me," and "Because I am going to the Father"? They kept asking, 'What does he mean by "a little while"? We don't understand what he is saying.'** Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, **'Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me"?"'**

Did you catch the key phrase? **“A little while.”** Seven times within three verses the Holy Spirit inspires John to record those words: “a little while.” They must be pretty important. Jesus is telling them and us, *“Take a step back. See the big picture. Whatever you’re going through, whatever you’re going to go through, it won’t last long. Hang in there. In a little while, it’ll be over.”* Have you ever had someone say those kinds of words to you as you go through a rough time in life? Do they help? Or do we think: *“That’s easy for you to say.”*

But it’s different when Jesus says it. Jesus has a different perspective than anyone else who’s ever spoken those words. First of all, he’s all-knowing. He knows how long our **“little whiles”** are going to be. For the disciples, he knew most of them wouldn’t see him after they abandoned him in the garden. But he also knew he’d see them 96 hours later in the locked room. He knew exactly how long their *little while* would be. And he knows exactly how long your little whiles will be. He knows how long you’ll suffer with your sickness. He knows how long your heart will ache. He knows how long our suffering will really be. He sees the big picture compared to eternity.

In those little whiles, he promises to do something: **“I tell you the truth . . . your grief WILL TURN to joy.”** Not, *“Your grief will be replaced by joy.”* Not, *“Your grief will coincide with joy.”* But, **“Your grief WILL TURN to joy.”** That is what Easter is all about. It takes a sad, seemingly hopeless situation and it turns it to joy. For the disciples, they mourned and grieved over the loss of their Savior. But when they saw him again after a little while, they realized that their Savior’s death was a payment for their sin. In view of Easter, the cross that caused them so much grief two days prior turned into a source of joy for them.

But Easter didn’t just change things for the disciples or the women at the tomb. It does it for you and for me. Instead of the guilt and grief of seeing our sins pinned on the cross, Easter turns the cross into a gift as we are assured God accepted Christ’s payment on our behalf. Instead of weeping at the grave of our loved one, Easter turns our tears into joy. Through faith in Christ, we will be reunited with our loved ones in heaven where Jesus wipes every tear from our eyes. Instead of lying awake at night fearing our own death, Easter turns our fears into a longing for a pleasant sleep where our souls enjoy heaven while we wait to be reunited with our glorious bodies on the Last Day. No matter how you look at it, Easter turns our grief into joy.

In many ways, we are like Private Delaney. In the scheme of eternity, we are nobody’s. We are sinners. We are guilty. There’s no question about it. We deserve death. Instead, we get life. Today is good day. It is a day to celebrate. In Christ alone, we have eternal life. In Christ alone, our grief is turned to joy. Amen.