

## April 5, 2015 – John 16:16-22

### *I Tell You the Truth...Your Sorrow Will Be Turned into Joy*

I am sure that we all have had the experience of our joy being taken away. Things seem to be going well, you're enjoying life, and then something happens that "takes the wind out of your sails" and ruins your day. Sometimes life can seem like a roller coaster with a few "highs" that are just followed by more and more lows.

The last week of Jesus' life must have been a real roller coaster for His disciples. They celebrated with Lazarus, Mary and Martha at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany the Saturday before Passover. The next day they followed Jesus into Jerusalem as the crowd joyfully shouted "Hosanna!" On Thursday they celebrated the Passover with Jesus. During this celebration He told them things they did not yet understand and He said that one of them would betray Him. After singing the joyful psalms commemorating the Passover, they left to go to the Mount of Olives. On the way, Jesus told them that they would all abandon Him, with Peter even denying that he knew Him. And then, while Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, the troops came with Judas and arrested Jesus. He was taken away and brought before the High Priest, Pontius Pilot, and King Herod and was eventually sentenced to death with the crowd hatefully shouting "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" He was hung on the cross where He died and then He was buried. On that first Easter morning, the women came back with the unbelievable news that Jesus' tomb was empty and they had seen a vision of angels who had told them that Jesus was alive. Peter and John ran to tomb and found it as they said, but they did not see Jesus.

On Thursday in that upper room Jesus had spoken encouraging words to His disciples to prepare them for the events that happened over the next several days. Today we consider Jesus' words found in John 16:16-22.

In His "I tell you the truth" statement here Jesus tells His disciples that they "*will weep and lament...and...be sorrowful.*" And that is what they did. After Peter denied Jesus the third time and the rooster crowed, He went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75). As Jesus was led away to be crucified, women followed Him mourning and lamenting (Luke 23:27). John tells us that Mary stood outside the empty tomb weeping that first Easter morning, because she thought that someone had taken Jesus' body away (John 20:11-13). Even after the disciples had met the risen Lord, they still experienced sorrows and difficulties. Peter was grieved when Jesus asked him if he really loved Him during that breakfast on the beach.

It would be nice if things were automatically easier as a Christian. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended to sit and rule at the right hand of the Father, life should be easy, shouldn't it? But that isn't what God promises. In fact, at the end of this chapter in John, Jesus tells His disciples: "*In the world you will have tribulations.*" (John 16:33). As we look at the lives of the apostles after Jesus ascended, we do see them experiencing tribulation after tribulation. They were arrested, beaten, stoned. They experienced shipwrecks, hunger and most were put to death.

We may not face the same persecution that they did, but we too have all experienced tribulation in the world. We have experienced sadness and loss. We have mourned over the death of a loved one. We have experienced the pain of relationships that have ended. We feel the guilt of sin and are troubled by the temptations we face.

Easter is a joyous time. We praise God for sending His Son to conquer sin and death. And we rejoice that God raised Jesus from the dead, showing that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted and He has taken away our sin and brought us eternal life. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we

know that He will also give life to our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11) so that we have to expectant hope of a resurrection to eternal life.

But not every day is filled with this same joy. Think over this past year. What are some of the things that have cause you sorrow or made you mourn? I cannot guarantee this coming year will be any better. But question isn't *what* we each face, but how we can deal with the difficulties that come our way.

Jesus gives us the answer here. He gives us great hope. Before He told His disciples that they would mourn and be sorrowful, He said, "*A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.*" John goes on to write, "*Then some of His disciples said among themselves, 'What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?' They said therefore, 'What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying.'*" Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him about this, so He said to them, "*Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?*"

That seems a little repetitive, doesn't it? There is a phrase that is repeated over and over. Did you catch it? It is: "*a little while*". In the original Greek, it is just one little 5-letter word, but the Holy Spirit inspired John to write it seven times within these four verses so that we would not miss this key phrase: "*a little while*." It even stood out to and puzzled the disciples so that they said: "*What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying.*"

Jesus words came true for the disciples that first Good Friday. Jesus died and was buried less than 24 hours after He spoke these words. His disciples did not see Him until He rose from the dead and appeared to them that Sunday evening. But Jesus also told them here that He was going to the Father. Forty days after He arose He ascended into heaven and His disciples again saw Him no more. But Jesus still assured them that their sorrow would last only *a little while*.

There is an adage that says: "This too shall pass." That kind of sounds like what Jesus is telling His disciples here. Has anyone ever tried to console or encourage you by saying: "Hang in there. You will get through this. It will be over before you know it"? If so, were you able to resist the urge to slap them or to reply, "Easy for you to say!"? Often we don't find this thought very comforting. The difficult times that we experience don't seem very short, especially while we are going through them. They don't seem like just *a little while*. Like Jesus' disciples we have trouble with this phrase.

But that is why these words are repeated here again and again, because we need to hear the truth that our sorrows will last just *a little while*. While this may sound empty coming from a friend or relative, remember who it is that is speaking here. It is Jesus who tells you that it will be just *a little while*. He is God and knows all things. He knows exactly how long your "little while" will be. And He "*will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,*" but He will give you the way to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13). When He says it will be just *a little while*, you can trust that it really will be.

But Jesus does not stop there. He tells His disciples that after *a little while* their sorrow will not only be done, but that it "*will be turned into joy*" (v. 20)! That is what Easter is all about. It takes a sad, seemingly hopeless situation and turns it into joy. The disciples mourned and grieved the death of their Savior, but when they saw Him again after *a little while*, they understood that His death paid for their sins and paid for the sins of the whole world – including yours! The cross that had caused so much grief on that Friday became a source of joy.

Jesus uses an interesting illustration here: a woman giving birth. While I cannot speak from experience, I am told that childbirth is very painful. But as Jesus says here, after the child is born all that pain becomes a distant memory. It is replaced with joy over the new life that has been born into the world. This shows how all the painful memories we have will be forgotten when we see Jesus again and experience the joys of heaven.

But this illustration is important for another reason. The pain in childbirth came as a result of sin (see Genesis 3:16). In fact, all the sorrows and pains that we experience come about because we live in a sin-stained world. God describes the affects of sin on creation as the whole creation groaning under birth pangs (Romans 8:22).

But Easter changes all that. Jesus' death on the cross took away the sins of the world. His resurrection showed that God accepted His life as a ransom for your sinful life. Your sins are forgiven. And you have been given new life. Jesus has taken away the power of sin that causes us so much grief.

Easter turns our sadness into joy. It shows us that even though we still live in this world filled with many sorrows, it will be only *a little while*. When Jesus went to the father, He promised to be with us until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He tells us that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is with them (Matthew 18:20). But because He has gone to the Father, we don't *see* Him. He is not physically present with us. That is why we now walk by faith, and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). But in *a little while* that will change. Jesus will return in *a little while*, and we shall see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12); we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2) and we will live with Him forever.

It is interesting that Jesus changes what He says in verse 22. Did you notice? In the first three verses Jesus said to His disciples, "*you will see Me...*" But in verse 22 He says, "*I will see you...*" This may seem like a small change, but consider the difference it makes! Jesus is not coming back so that you can see Him like a distance celebrity walking the red carpet. Instead, He is coming back to see you! He longs to see you and fill your heart with joy in His presence, a joy that no one will take from you.

You will experience sorrow in this life, but Jesus died and rose again from the dead to take away the sins that cause your sorrow. In *a little while* He is coming again to see you so that your heart will rejoice. And this joy will never be taken from you. So rejoice, for this Easter is for you.

### **Rock of Ages Evangelical Lutheran Church**

[www.GrandRapidsLutheran.org](http://www.GrandRapidsLutheran.org)

Pastor Peter T. Evensen

616-322-9167 (cell)

[peterevensen@icloud.com](mailto:peterevensen@icloud.com)