

Easter 4 - John 16:16-23

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John 16:16-23

¹⁶“In a little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.”

¹⁷Therefore some of his disciples asked one another, “What does he mean when he tells us, ‘In a little while you are not going to see me, and again in a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going away to the Father?’” ¹⁸So they kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he’s saying.”

¹⁹Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you trying to determine with one another what I meant by saying, ‘In a little while you are not going to see me, and again in a little while you will see me’?” ²⁰Amen, Amen, I tell you: You will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. ²¹A woman giving birth has pain, because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of her joy that a person has been born into the world.

²²“So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.” ²³In that day you will not ask me anything. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.”

A Little While

On Tuesday of this week, a pastor in our fellowship of churches, Pastor Bouman who serves a congregation in New York City, was on his way to another pastor’s conference in San Antonio, TX. It was a celebration of ministry conference, a conference for pastors and their wives celebrating 5, 10, 20, 30 years, in the ministry. They said goodbye to their three daughters who they left at home with their grandpa. But 20 minutes after his flight took off from LaGuardia to Dallas, there was an explosion on the plane - a part one of the engines ripped apart the engine and went through a window in the plane. The plane immediately started dropping.

During the next few moments, Pastor Bourman said he knew he needed to get a message to his daughters. His wife connected to the planes wifi and they sent a message to their daughters. It said: "Never lose your faith in God. Jesus loves you girls."

When you go away for a Pastors conference, or any trip, you don’t expect to say goodbye for the last time. You expect to say “goodbye...for a little while. But I’ll see you again.” But really, that’s exactly what Pastor Bourman was saying too.

The plane did finally land in Philadelphia. When CNN interviewed Pastor Bourman afterwards, he said that at the time he thought: "They're going to get this [message] from their dad from the grave..." Pastor Bourman said he thought he was going to die, but he worried more about his three young daughters than himself. He said “I knew ... that my God was going to take care of me one way or another.”

When Jesus was talking to His disciples in our text this morning, Jesus too said that He was going away for a little while, but that He would see the, again:

¹⁶“In a little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.”

Now this wasn't just Jesus going away on a trip, His own pastors conference. Jesus knew what kind of 'goodbye' this was. This was Maundy Thursday, the evening before Good Friday, just hours before Jesus would be crucified and killed on the cross. And yet Jesus didn't just say, "In a little while you are not going to see me anymore," because I'm going to die tomorrow. No, Jesus added, "*again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.*"

We know looking back at this what was going to happen: Jesus was going to die, but three days later He was going to rise from the dead. Their sorrow will be turned to joy.

Well of course they will be happy again. Three days? That's not very long. Jesus really did mean "a little while." If I knew that a loved one was going to go away, was going to die for only three days; if I knew that if someone got on a plane that was going to crash but that I would see them again in three days, well, that wouldn't be great, but it wouldn't be the worst thing. So what comfort does this give me, when the death that I face - the death of my family and friends and loved ones - lasts longer than three days? The death I face is permanent.

But the disciples didn't know Jesus was going to rise from the dead. To be sure, He had told them, but they didn't understand. For all they knew it was the end. It was permanent. It was worse than permanent death. It meant that everything Jesus told them was a lie. It meant everything he had promised - forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, freedom from sin, and everlasting hope - was a lie. And on top of it all, they knew the Romans would try to get rid of the followers of this guy they had just horribly tortured and killed. Jesus' death meant the death of their hope.

So with their hope gone, immediately after Jesus' death, they did what anyone would do - what we would do. Hide. Cower in fear and sorrow. Run away from the world. Shut the doors. Wallow in pity. No one from the outside was going to break through. The disciples were human and facing real death, just like we do.

Like them, our sorrow can overwhelm us too. Sorrow can very easily turn into an expression of self-pity. When something terrible happens in our life, perhaps we are unable to accept that situation. We mull and muse over our problems constantly. We feel gloomy and depressed over what life (or God) has dealt us. We feel like a victim. God becomes not the merciful caregiver, but at least with how our emotions tell us, the enemy.

So in situations like this, where we face real death, real sorrow, real suffering, real crosses, what do we do? Do we wallow in our self-pity because it causes others to have to pay attention to us and care for us? In reality, that may give us the momentary pleasure of being supported, being cared for, being emotionally pampered - having joy for a little while. But that's all it is - momentary joy. It's a fleeting joy that hinders genuine prayer for God's help and deliverance. It's joy that turns us inward, instead of outward. It's joy that lasts only "a little while."

But Jesus knows what His disciples will face, He knows what they will feel - and He knows what we really feel too, and John records this for our benefit: "*Amen, Amen, I tell you: You will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.*"

And then he explains what kind of joy this will be: "*A woman giving birth has pain, because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers the anguish,*

because of her joy that a person has been born into the world. So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

The joy Jesus gives isn't temporary. It doesn't last only "a little while." Like the birth of a child, it's a joy that continues. It's a joy that lasts forever. It's a joy no one can take away from you. It's a joy that comes from Christ to you. So what joy is this? The joy of the resurrection.

By faith in God's promises worked through His Word and Baptism, all believers have been joined to Christ's resurrection. Sorrow can do nothing to overcome it. Your Sins can't taunt you. Even death can't end your joy. Because death lasts only "a little while." In fact, for believers, it doesn't even last three days. It lasts only an instant.

It's a great mystery, as the Apostle Paul explains it: *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"* (1 Cor. 15:51-52). He says elsewhere, *"That we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep...Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them...And thus we shall always be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

So what does that mean for your loved ones who have already died? What does it mean for those in the faith, who have already said their last goodbyes to you - or even the ones who were taken so suddenly they never were able to say 'goodbye'? They truly will see you again "in a little while," in an instant. They won't even have time to look down on you on this earth and pity you. Seeing us here would only mean that our suffering and sorrow would affect them. And there's no suffering or sorrow in heaven. Heaven is eternal joy - a world without beginning and without end - outside of time and free from sorrow.

But we're still on earth. We are still bound with time, suffering, sin, and death. So Jesus says to us, *"So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."*

That's a joy that doesn't begin in heaven. It's a joy that began with Jesus' resurrection. A joy you have now. Jesus has risen again in this world, to give you the comfort from heaven. Jesus' resurrection from the dead means that, *right now*, you have the forgiveness of sins, *right now* you have eternal life, *right now* you have salvation from your sins and the sorrow they cause, *right now* you have eternal hope.

So in situations where we face real death, real sorrow, real suffering, real crosses, what do we do? We look to the cross, where Jesus suffered all of our crosses, and we look beyond it to the empty tomb. We look to the one who died, permitted His own disciples to be sorrowful for a little while, and then rose from the dead, giving them eternal joy.

Our lives can turn to sorrow in an instant. But God knows how to turn our sorrow into joy. He did it by Jesus' resurrection. And because Christ is risen from the dead, He promises to hear our prayers for Jesus' sake.

"Amen, Amen, [Christ tells] you: Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you." That includes help, comfort, and strength to face whatever crosses you may bear, even the

cross of death. He assures you it last only “a little while” because Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, Amen.