

Easter Sunday
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.

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

I. You will weep, mourn, and grieve

II. Your grief will turn to joy

It was two years ago on Easter that I watched with happiness and joy as water trickled down the head of my newborn baby boy as God clothed my son with Christ and made him his own. Baptized on Easter! Connected to and clothed with Christ who lived and died to take away his sins and mine and yours! What a special day that was! It was a day that not only left me with a smile on my face, but it made my heart glad and it filled my soul with joy.

I wish I could say that I have had a smile on my face every single moment and every single day since that Easter two years ago. But that’s not exactly how life works, does it?

But today is Easter again. Of all the days of the year, our hearts ought to be grinning and glowing. The memory of Easters gone by rush back and perhaps there is a smile in our heart and on our face. It makes your heart glad to see the flowers in front of the church, the children in their Easter best. It makes you smile as you join with family for a special meal or two. Of all the days of the years, happiness and gladness should abound, the alleluias should be pumping through our veins as we think about what our God has done for us. But I doubt if you always have such a feeling, I even doubt if your spiritual heartbeat is always so upbeat.

And of course I am not alone in such a prognosis. Christians have always had ups and downs; reasons to grin and reasons to frown. Our Savior once told his disciples, ***“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve....”*** Weep. Mourn. Grieve. Just a few days after saying these words, that’s exactly what his followers would be going through. As he speaks with them just a few

days before his death he looks ahead. On that first Easter morning the rooster's crow would still be ringing in Peter's ears and the taste of those bitter tears would still be fresh. Mary Magdalene, the faithful follower of Jesus, her tears would be found wetting the very graveside of Jesus, early that Sunday morning. Weep. Mourn. Grieve. Even after Jesus appears to his disciples, even with the joy of the resurrected Lord in front of him, we see Peter reeling when Jesus asks him a question that makes his heart hurt, especially when Jesus asks it a third time, ***"Peter, Do you love me?" (John 21:17)***

Why do the Scriptures share such raw emotions? Well, that's reality, isn't it? That's how life works. If we ever have this delusion that the Christian life is one of ease, read the Scriptures and your delusion will soon be altered and corrected. Christians hurt. We weep with sadness. We mourn over losses. We grieve over guilt. But the pages of Scripture don't have to tell us that; do they? No, in this case the pages of Scripture simply confirm what we see in our own lives.

Your heart may be smiling today. Maybe woke up today and genuinely sang, "Welcome, Happy Morning!" But I can guarantee that wasn't the case every day since last Easter and certainly not since that Easter two years ago. And I can guarantee it won't be the case every day until next Easter.

You know all too well what caused your tears this year. The disappointments that you experienced: the broken trust, the broken promises, the broken heart. You know too well whose death you mourned: the parent, the spouse, the neighbor, the friend. You mourned, you hurt over the death that happened this year, and the death that happened years ago still takes it toll. What about the sins that caused you to grieve this year? Those sins of habit *and* those sins of choice grieved you because you knew that they grieved the heart of God. Grieve and mourn. We experience sadness and sorrow.

But the real question today isn't what pain you have or what's causing you grief. You didn't have to come here to think about that. The question of importance, as we gather together on this Easter morning is, how will you deal with all of this? Better yet, how does God deal with all of this? Jesus had a wonderful answer to give to 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"?"***

It's rather obvious which words stand out in this section. Seven times within three verses the Holy Spirit inspires John to record those words: a little while. Jesus says these words. The disciples repeat them and ask them again. What does he mean by

saying, "In a little while." And then Jesus repeats them again. Seven times John records these words; in a little while. That must mean that these words are rather important. Jesus is conveying this important truth to disciples, he is telling us, *"Take a step back. See the big picture. Whatever you are going through, whatever you are going to go through, it won't last long. Hang in there. In a little while, it'll be over."*

Sometimes we may want roll our eyes or even lash out a person who says that when you are going through a tough time. But it is different when Jesus says it. Jesus has a different perspective than anyone else, who has ever, spoke such words. First of all, he's all knowing. He knows exactly 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 until after his resurrection. But Jesus also knew he'd see them some 96 hours later in that locked room. He knew exactly how long their 'little while' would be. And he knows exactly how long your 'little whiles' will be too. He knows how long you'll suffer with your sickness. He knows how long you will have to watch your loved one struggle. He knows how long your heart will ache. And he promises not to let you suffer beyond what you can bear. Hang in there; it will be just "a little while."

We trust in his words of assurance because not only is Jesus all-knowing but he's also eternal, which means he has got a much better grasp about how long our suffering really is in the whole scheme of things. An 80 year old is going to have a different perspective on the span of one year than a 14 year old, and that experience will be beneficial in handing out advice how to handle difficult situations. Well, now consider our Savior's eternal perspective. He knows our troubles are indeed light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that awaits. He knows suffering and he knows eternity, and he tells us that we will suffer for only a little while.

We will have to see difficulty, we will go through sorrow, and grief, and toil, and frustration. We will weep and mourn, and even wail as we feel pain and experience sorrow, but our Savior assures us, he tells us the truth that our grief will turn into to joy. That's the truth that our Savior tells us, his disciples. He does not say that, "Your grief will be replaced by joy." He does not say, "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 great joy.

Look what Easter does to the grave. There was Mary, crying at the tomb. But when her Savior stood next to her and called her by name, Easter turned that cold hole in the rock into the rock of her faith, as it powerfully declared Jesus to be whom he claimed to be, the Son of God. Easter turned her grief into joy.

But Easter didn't just change things for the disciples or the women at the tomb. It does it for you and me too. 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 without hope at the grave of our loved one, Easter turns our tears into an expression of the blessings of friendship and family that our God gives to us on earth as we hold onto the sure hope of being reunited with our loved ones in a place where Jesus wipes every tear from his believer's eyes. Instead of lying awake at night fearing our own punishments and death, Easter turns our fears into confidence. We know that Jesus has paid the price of punishment for our sins and now we can wait confidently and patiently for the pleasant sleep of death from which we will awake to eternal life. No matter, how you look at it, Easter turns our grief into joy.

Yes, since that wonderful Easter two years ago, there have certainly been moments of both happiness and grief, both tears of joy and tears of sorrow, both sadness and laughter, both pain and delight, in my life and in yours. But because of the faith that I have, that same faith that was poured out into my son's heart through water and the Word, and that same faith that you share - because of that blessing of faith in Jesus - we know that have joy that we can lean on and depend on in good times and bad times. More reliable than an earthly happiness that fluctuates as it follows the peaks and valleys of life and the up and down of our emotions, we have joy in Jesus that is a solid truth that is steadfast and our Savior promises that this joy is one that no one can take away. We have the joy of sins forgiven, and the gift of eternal life. We may not always be smiling from ear to ear. We may not always be filled with feelings of absolute delight and total happiness, no, instead our hearts may ache, there might times of sorrow, and sadness, but because of the lasting joy that we have in Jesus we know that these difficult times will be over in a little while. The Lord will see us through the troubles of life and eventually he will see us to our heavenly home of eternal joy and peace. Because you see not only does the Lord give us earthly happiness, that comes and goes with time, that wilts and blooms with the seasons, or ebbs and flows because of our circumstance in life, but rather our God gives us *eternal* joy in our sinless Savior, who died and rose again so that we may have a joy that no one can ever take away.

So go ahead and smile this day when we greet each other with the words Happy Easter Sunday. Enjoy the gifts of food and family. But also let your heart and your voice and your soul sing, because you know the undeniable truth that the Lord not only gives us reasons to smile, but he gives us a joy in our risen Savior that is a constant source of peace. No matter the expression on our face or the feelings we experience, we will have an unending joy that we can count on through our risen and living Savior, Jesus Christ. Have a Happy Easter and find joy in the resurrection of your LORD. Alleluia! Rejoice! He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Amen!