

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday of Easter
John 16:16-22
April 17th, 2016

We are still in the midst of the Easter Season and the Gospel text for today is quite evident of that very thing. Jesus says, "*Your sorrow will turn to joy.*" These words a picture of the end of Holy Week. The sorrow of Judas' betrayal, the sorrow of Peter's denial, the sorrowful chants of the pro-Pharisee crowd at the Praetorium, the sorrow of the whips, of the crown, of the march to Golgotha, and the nails entering flesh and driven into a cross has been transformed into shouts of Alleluia as Jesus embodies joy that comes from death into life. This statement by Jesus is Easter in a nutshell. Jesus said it in John chapter sixteen, lived it during Holy Week and Easter Sunday, and proclaims to His church today and every day since.

And, yet, just like the disciples in the text today, we are still asking those questions, "*What is this that he says to us?*" and "*What does He mean by 'a little while'?*" and saying to Jesus, "*We do not know what you are talking about.*" The questions we ask about "when, how, and in which way," still fill our hearts when we have those deep questions about life just don't seem to have satisfactory answers. And, as you have realized, your two pastors stand up here on Sunday mornings, preaching to you from that Word of God and aren't giving you those exact, satisfactory answers to the situation you are dealing with in the here and now. We stink at giving you those kinds of insights. Take it one step further, the Word of God stinks at telling us the "when, how, and in which way" answers that our little heart's desire when sorrow rules the day and we seek joy to take its place.

We are all in the same boat on this one. We want more than just the consolation from Jesus that, "*In a little while you won't see me and then in a little while you will see me.*" That's not good enough, Jesus. I need to know more. Or, when He says, "*you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.*" That's not good enough, Jesus. I need to know more?

Here we have two blessed promises from Jesus – "*you will see me again*" and "*your sorrow will turn into joy*" and yet these promises are insufficient. There is not enough information to really help us. These promises don't fill in the gaps of life and answer those questions, "when, how and in which way." So, often we feel as if God leaves us dangling in the wind without the information that we absolutely need to make us feel better, to calm our aching hearts when troubles have their way with us. If this stress I'm living with right now – if this anxiety is to subside, I'm going to need more information. I'm going to need you to tell me, "when, how and in which way."

So, why doesn't God give us those answers – you know – the answers we really need? He gives us the basics, and that is good. But we need to know more. Well, I'm going to give you an answer. I have no idea. See, I told you I stink at giving you those kinds of answers. I told you that the Word of God stinks at answering those specific questions that weigh heavy on your heart.

Two things that need to be noted about our deep and pressing questions. First of all, they really are not as important as you might think. Secondly, I would like to ask you a question... what if God Himself descended from heaven, directly to you, and told you play by play how you will be brought from sorrow to joy... and you didn't like the answer? Moreover, you don't even understand all the steps of where the Lord would lead anyway. He has you with this burden that

actually got bigger before it got smaller. Then there is this pain in life which He tells you will get worse and get more painful. Then, we are left with more questions. We are left with more of a feeling of abandonment because God came down from heaven and told you that from one point to the next for you is NOT a straight line. Dips and valleys will be a part of it. Mountain top experiences of great joy will be too. But all this is not how you imagined it. And we tell God, you got it wrong. We ask, "Where are you, Lord? Where is your compassion and mercy? I thought the Christian life was filled with pleasant results and a 'smoother' path." And all the time forgetting that the word Jesus Himself uses is "sorrow." If He uses it, there must be something to it.

Here is where we love to play God. Here is where we like to think we know better. Here is where we want to take control of our lives when we think God has no control. Here is where we tend to stray instead of getting on our knees at the foot of the cross. Here is where we begin to think God doesn't know as much as you thought He did and that you know better than Him. Here is where we start to ignore His guidance, His providence, and His life-giving means that gives you the strength you need to battle the "sorrowful" times until He translates that into joy. Beloved, the "when, the how, and the which way" will elude us if we are looking strictly at ourselves. So, turn from looking inward. Turn from playing God.

But if we look in the Word, God does give us the answers. "When" do we see Jesus? Today. In His Holy Word. Yes, He is alive, after death, to show you that you too shall live. When do we see Jesus? He promises to return on the last day to fulfill all things. And in the meantime, we see Him and He comes. He comes in that Word and Sacraments that nourishes us. The When of Jesus' coming is both now and yet to be. There's your answer.

What about the "how"? Today, for you, it's in the Word. It's in the forgiveness of sins in Baptism. Today, it's in the Lord's Supper. You've heard me say this so many times, but it is true and really beloved in the Lord it is enough. This is how He chooses to come to you at this time, until He comes again... until we see Him in all glory in heaven.

What about the question, "In which way?" Well, He brings sorrow to joy in just the way He promises. He will take us through the bumps and bruises to the kingdom of righteousness. The "which way" will have turns, dips, valleys, and even blessed mountain tops – but the way always has a destination that ends in ultimate joy for you. You are a Christian who is forgiven – by God's grace in faith that Jesus died for us.

So, for each of our days, keep in mind, dearly beloved, that we live in Holy Week to Easter. Shouts of Hosanna on our good days. Driving out money changers in the temple in our angry days. Forsaken by your own people on the disappointing days, suffering that cannot be explained with nails slammed in flesh, on sorrowful days... but back to life, brought by God in the resurrection, on those joy-filled and completed for you days. Truthfully, you won't get every sorrowful to joy detail for your life. You know that. But I can tell you what it will look like – what I just explained. Palm Sunday to Easter. Never forget what Jesus said to end this section. "*And no one will take your joy from you.*" That's a promise. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.