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John 16:17-33
April 6, 2025

Grief Turned to Joy

I have so enjoyed our Adult Sunday school class on the Book of Revelation. Thank you to everyone who has taken part. When we take time to learn from the Bible and one another, we strengthen our faith and are better equipped to be Jesus' witnesses to the world around us.

We are nearing the end with just one last class together, there are several things that have given me hope today. As followers of Jesus, we can be certain that no matter how weird things get with Babylon and the spirit of the anti-Christ among us, we can be certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that in the end, Team Jesus wins. Jesus has over come the world! That is Good News!

But in the meantime, until Jesus returns to right everything that is broken in our world, we have some work to do. We must be persistent in prayer, unwavering in faith, and hopeful in our afflictions. This is what Jesus encouraged his disciples as the last thing he said to them before he closed their time together with prayer.

We are continuing the last supper discourse where Jesus shared his final words with his disciples. Please turn with me to John 16:17-33.

17 At this, 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** Very truly I tell you, 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. **23** In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. **24** Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

25 "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. **26** In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. **27** No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have

believed that I came from God. **28** I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

29 Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. **30** Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”

31 “Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. **32** “A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

I hate to admit it but I have entered that stage of life when you think more and more about getting one’s affairs in order. I mean updating wills, establishing advance health care directives, and setting powers of attorney. It is so important to have our desires clearly spelled out for our loved ones so that there are no questions should they need them much sooner than anticipated. I have no plans on checking out of this world anytime soon, but if there is anything that COVID taught me, life is fragile and none of us know the day and time when we will each stand before the Lord face to face. So it’s good to be ready.

By the way, if you have not taken care of these details yet. Please don’t leave your loved ones a mess by having them navigate the court’s probate system while they are still grieving. Grief is hard enough on its own. Having to untangle a probate mess that could have been avoided while we are still living, adds salt to the wound. Let’s not do it.

Today’s scripture is like Jesus taking care important last details with the spiritual children he was leaving behind. I want to look at what Jesus meant by “in a little while.” We’ll explore this short parable he told of a woman in labor. We’ll talk about the importance of prayer in Jesus’ name. We’ll consider what Jesus meant by having trouble in the world and how we can have peace. And we’ll ask what is the Holy Spirit saying to us today?

Micron was the Greek word that Jesus used for a little, a small quantity, or a little while. Seven times in just four verses, Jesus uses this phrase, “In a little while, you will see me no longer or you will see me again.” He was describing several periods of time where Jesus would not be physically present with them.

His first physical absence would be during the three days after his crucifixion when he was dead and buried in the tomb. Then there were forty days after his resurrection when he showed himself to his disciples until his ascension into

heaven. And then there have been over two thousand years since his ascension into heaven and his anticipated return at the end of the age.

Reminds me of a man who was speaking to God and asked him, "God is it true that to you a thousand years is a minute?" "That's true," God replied. "And is it true that to you \$1,000,000 is like a penny?" "That's true," God said. "Well, you see I'm poor and I was wondering if you could give me a penny," asked the man. "Sure," said God, "in a minute."

Time to us and time to God are not the same thing. God is not constrained by time. God existed before all things, exists today, and will always exist in the future.

Humans, on the other hand, are limited by time. Each of us have a unique number of days ordained on earth. Some short. Some long. But in comparison to God, we are like the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow.¹ So for us, time is much more important. We see that in each of Jesus' explanations of his pending absences when he described them as micron. "A little while" was the same to him whether it was three days, forty days, or two thousand years. To his disciples while they were grieving, it would seem like forever.

But even amidst their grief, Jesus gave them some hope, by telling them this short parable from everyday life. He used the example of a woman in child birth.

Jesus said, "Amen, Amen" or some translations say, "Truly, Truly." Our text says, "I tell you the truth." Amen is Greek for truly, surely, or so be it. So when we say, "Amen" at the end of a sermon or prayer, we are confirming that what has just been said is true. Jesus used this phrase often to distinguish what he was tell his disciples was true as opposed to what the rabbis and teachers of the law were teaching the people. Remember that as we close in prayer today. Now you know what you are saying when you add "Amen."

He said, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 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. 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."

Now I realize that for a man preaching on the pain of childbearing is talking about something that we have no idea what it's like. That is true. But I remember watching my wife go through that pain with the births of each of our children.

¹ Matthew 6:30

Somehow, God has given women the ability to withstand an incredible amount of pain. It's unbelievable. Truly miraculous. But I guarantee if we men were the child bearers of the world, there'd be a lot less children. If any! Amen! Amen!

Jesus said, that a woman "forgets" the anguish of birth because of her joy. The Greek actually states that she is no longer mindful of her pain, meaning it no longer has control over her, but she has overcome the memory of the pain, because stronger is the memory of the joy that came after the birth. Especially if she had a positive birth experience. Perhaps Jesus might label it as "Type 2 Fun" or something enjoyable longer after the fact, while in the midst of it, it was pure misery.

The disciples would have the pain of witnessing Jesus' cruel arrest, crucifixion, and tormenting death. Then on the first night of Jesus' resurrection, when the disciples were locked away in a hidden room, afraid, Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." The disciples' grief was turned to joy.

This is the same for us today as we are in this in-between time of Jesus' ascension into heaven and his triumphant return at the end of the age. Despite the pain we are experiencing today, we know that one day, soon, Jesus will return, hold evil accountable, and restore the earth to the way it should have been before the fall of humankind. That is what we professed when we said the Nicene Creed last week.

But in the in-between period when Jesus is not physically with us, he gives us the gift of His Holy Spirit, the Counselor, who will always be with us and not leave us orphaned. And we are given the ability through prayer to talk directly with God about anything we wish. If we ask in Jesus' name.

Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repairman worked nearby. "Kneeling is definitely best," claimed one.

"No," another contended. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"You're both wrong," the third insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor."

The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole."

Several times throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells his disciples to ask for things in his name.

Matthew 18 Jesus said, “I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”²

Matthew 21, “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”³

Mark 11, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”⁴

John 14, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”⁵

John 15, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.”⁶

John 16, “If you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”⁷

So does that mean that God is like some vending machine in heaven that if we put in our prayer coins, he will give us anything we want?

No! The key here is asking in Jesus’ name. It is not some magic formula. But what we are doing is asking in alignment with God’s will and through the power and authority of Jesus, seeking His glory and good for our life. That’s why we pray in Jesus’ name. We pray as if Jesus were praying to God the Father.

The last piece that I want to expound upon is probably one of the best verses for us to lean into when there is so much chaos and strife in our present world.

Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”⁸

The Greek word for peace is “eirene.” It means prosperity, quietness, or rest.

The Greek word for trouble is “thlipsis.” It means affliction, persecution, or tribulation.

God wants us to have peace and joy which transcends our external circumstances or thlipsis. It comes from knowing that God is sovereign and in control while the world spins fretfully out of control around us. It comes from knowing that we belong to God and are being held in the palm of God’s hand. It comes from knowing that through the cross, Jesus has conquered sin and death. It

² Matthew 18:19

³ Matthew 21:22

⁴ Mark 11:24

⁵ John 14:13-14

⁶ John 15:7

⁷ John 16:23b-24

⁸ John 16:33

comes from knowing in our gut that whether in life or in death, we belong to the Lord. And it comes from the blessed assurance that no matter how bad things might get here on earth until Jesus returns, we know in the end Jesus wins, holds evil accountable, and will restore all of creation to its original splendor. That is the best news yet!

So how are we as followers of Jesus to live in the mean time?

We are to be a people of persistent prayer. We ask for what we need and want, with thanksgiving, in accordance with Jesus' heart, and God's will, trusting that God will hear us and give us what we need when we need it.⁹

We are to have enduring faith. We remain sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. And whether or not what we hope for comes true in our life doesn't matter, because we also believe that that God could have something better in store for us.¹⁰

We are to live as followers of Jesus which often clashes with the world's way.¹¹

We do not conform the patterns of the world, but are transformed by the renewing of our minds as our act of worship.¹²

We love God with our whole hearts, minds, and strength. We love others as ourselves, even our enemies, as Jesus taught.¹³

We obey God's Word and follow Christ's examples.¹⁴

We pray for those who persecute us and extend God's peace to others.¹⁵

We practice radical hospitality to people who are different from us.¹⁶

We confess our sins, practice repentance, and forgive those who have sinned against us.¹⁷

We care for the most vulnerable in our midst.¹⁸

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁰ Hebrews 11:1, 39-40

¹¹ John 15:18

¹² Romans 12:2

¹³ Matthew 5:43-47; 22:37; Mark 12:30

¹⁴ Colossians 3:17

¹⁵ Matthew 5:44

¹⁶ Hebrews 13:2

¹⁷ Matthew 16:12

¹⁸ James 1:27

We don't give up worshiping regularly because we believe that it is the minimal spiritual diet for God's people.¹⁹

We bravely, but peacefully, stand up to and speak truth to power when that God given authority is abused.²⁰

We believe that because Jesus conquered sin and death, that we too stand victorious with Him in all things.²¹

And we trust that in the end, come what may, Jesus wins, when every knee will bow and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord of all.²²

We do this not because we possess the strength and ability in ourselves, but because Christ lives in us and shines through us.²³

So may we believe that Jesus is coming back in just a little while. May we hold the faith until that time. May we remain persistent in prayer. And may we have hope that while weeping may last for a night, joy comes in the morning.²⁴

Amen. Amen.

¹⁹ Hebrews 10:25

²⁰ Acts 18:9-10

²¹ 1 Corinthians 15:54-56

²² Philippians 2:10-11

²³ Philippians 4:13

²⁴ Psalm 30:5