

EASTER 3: A LITTLE WHILE

Text: John 16:16-22.

“Jesus said to his disciples, A little while, and ye shall not see me: an again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father....Verily, verily I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy”. This morning I bring you greetings in His glorious name as we wait for the day when He returns to us in joy. AMEN

Did you ever have one of those moments of total confusion where you hear something and the only way you can react to it is with a blank stare? The Gospels tell us that on many occasions Jesus’ sayings were often misunderstood, or not clear in the minds of those who heard what He had to say. The disciples however had been catching on. They were close to the miracles, saw the healings and heard the pronouncements of our Lord to those He came in contact with. They had been with Him on His journey every day of His ministry. Imagine for a moment the joy of waking every morning with the Son of God, sharing a meal with Him, sitting at His feet as He spoke, chatting with Him as you walked from town to town and lying down to go to sleep knowing that just a few feet away, Jesus the Christ was there next to you.

Now however, after three years together, Jesus began to talk of leaving them, of going back to the Father. He had alluded to His impending suffering and death and as the Passover approached, and suddenly those conversations were getting more frequent. I am sure His disciples found all of this a little unnerving for the Gospel alludes to the level of uncertainty that they showed in hearing what our Lord was saying to them.

I am also sure that not one of them was prepared for what was going to happen with the coming of the Passover. The fellowship they shared at the last supper, the breaking of bread, would soon turn to the breaking of their spirit as Christ was beaten and ridiculed and then hung on the cross at Calvary. Their pronouncements of “not me Lord”, or even Peter’s brash claim that he would never deny the Christ turned to fear and cowardice as our Lord dragged His cross through the streets of Jerusalem.

As our Lord was nailed to the cross, they hid in fear of their lives. They did not know what was coming nor did they understand what was going to happen as Christ broke the chains of death, BUT our Lord knew. It was clear that He was trying to break it to them gently, to be careful of their feelings, to not allow them to lose all hope. We understand that. Ever give someone you love bad news? You try to think more of their feelings than of yours, even when the bad news is about you.

Our Lord was already trying to comfort them because as their disciples, He knew that those who wanted to put Him to death would rejoice in His hanging on the cross. He knew they would be mocked and their faith would be challenged and in seeing Him die, they would become lost, would be in terror and that their lives would be filled with sorrow.

Yet He tells them, like a mother in childbirth, the pain is soon forgotten in the joy of seeing a new life brought into the world. He knew they would rejoice at seeing Him again once they that death had no power over Him. Remember Easter morning? It took all of this a little time to settle in. The disciples did not believe Mary; some of them ran to the tomb to see for themselves. Even when He came to them, some did not recognize Him. Thomas needed physical proof. Finally they all realized that everything bad they had just experienced had now turned into an eternal good. Jesus the Christ, the son of the living God had returned to them.

For so many who have trouble believing, we need only turn to the lives of this small band of devoted followers to see the proof of our Lord’s existence and His claims of being the Christ. These followers after the death of this prophet should have all disappeared from history if the resurrection of our Lord wasn’t true. They, like many throughout history, would have gone back to their homes, their families and their professions and like countless others who followed mere men, would have faded into obscurity.

But not these followers-they continued on. They traveled to many parts of the known world, they spread the news of the Gospel, and they talked about Jesus and repeated His words to all who would hear. In the end, many of them would face gruesome deaths and yet they did not waiver. The message of Christ, spread by these followers has endured for 2,000 years. Man does not remain this committed to anything with such conviction without it being true. They lived with Him, they saw Him die and they saw the glory of the resurrection. They were there-and so are we.

The message of this Gospel passage is not just confined to the disciples who were there with Christ but to all of us today and throughout all of history. Each of us in our own lives faces the many trials and tribulations that life has in it. There are days of peace and joy, days of pain and sadness, and certainly days of suffering and death. There are also those days when the world assaults us and the values of the new age challenge what we have practiced and held dear as Christians all of our lives. We see what is socially acceptable, replacing what is morally acceptable, in God's eyes. The world tries to marginalize Jesus Christ, bring Him down to our level, make Him equal with all the other prophets and historical teachers and in many cases, deny His divinity. The same work of the devil that brought Christ to Calvary then now tries to convince man that he should be the center of all creation. It is often confrontational, more often very subtle, but it is real and Christians find themselves today where they found themselves in the first century-objects of contempt, distrust and even persecution. Yet throughout all of this, our Lord holds out His promise to us, "ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy."

As our Lord held out His promise to the disciples just before His crucifixion, He holds out His promise to us in our daily lives as we wait for His coming again. No matter what in life assaults us, we don't need to run and hide. We are to stay focused on the cross of Christ which shines as a beacon for us and holds out hope, the promise of salvation, the gift of eternal life and all of God's richest blessings.

Like the day when Christ went to the cross, those who follow Him can lose heart when it seems that everything they have come to count on is passing away. Instability in our lives will often blind us to the truth of the stability of God. We begin to believe more in ourselves and we lose our trust in God. Then when we are disappointed because man has failed us, we become bitter and angry and blame God. How can we be so arrogant in our attitudes?

I was a seafarer by trade. Having spent many an hour on the oceans of the world, I have seen both the peace of calm waters and the rage of stormy seas. I have often remembered what is said in Psalm 107- "Some sailed over the ocean in ships, earning their living on the seas. He commanded, and a mighty wind began to blow and stirred up the waves. The ships were lifted high in the air and plunged down into the depths. In such danger, the men lost their courage, they stumbled and staggered like drunks, all their skill was useless. Then in their trouble they called to the Lord, and He saved them from their distress. He calmed the raging storm, and the waves became quiet, and He brought them safe to port." I also remember that in our arrogance, we can just as easily turn from God. Seafarers also remember what was said of the TITANIC before she sailed on her maiden voyage, that "God Himself could not sink this ship."

So often in our lives we face troubles that can drive us into the depths of despair. These troubles may even be related to the church itself. Yet God is always there for us, reaching out to us with a lifeline, ready to hold us up and carry us to safety. "Trust in God at all times, my people. Tell Him your troubles for He is our refuge" said the Psalmist in Psalm 60. We should never trust in man or his institutions but only in God without hesitation, for man's world will always fail but God's love is never ceasing.

It took the resurrection of Jesus Christ to bring the disciples out of hiding but for them it gave them strength to take the message forth to mankind through the power of the Holy Spirit. We have seen Christ's death on the cross, the demonstration of His love for us and the breaking of the bonds of death on Easter. Like the disciples, we should be ready to go forth into the world, trusting in God, bringing His message to all, and standing up to the world by letting the love of Christ shine in each of us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Never despair in life's trials and tribulations and let your lives be filled with joy for God is with us everyday, always constant, always reliable. And when life seems like it is overcoming us, remember how Christ has overcome the world and keep in your hearts His promise to us "That is how it is with you; now you are sad, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness, the kind of gladness that no one can take away from you." AMEN

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