

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

John 16:16-22

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

In the name of Jesus, who proved all his promises to be true when he rose from the grave, dear fellow recipients of life,

It was February 27, 1991. President George Herbert Walker Bush was about to announce the end of the Gulf War when Pvt. Clayton Carpenter of Humboldt, KS stepped on a land mine. The army listed him as killed in action; just another of the 148 casualties of the Gulf War. A day or two later, the phone rang at his mother house. Ruth (her name) couldn't believe what she was hearing!

IT WAS HER SON'S VOICE! Clayton Carpenter was on the other end! Ruth was shell-shocked. She could hardly talk. She could hardly breathe. Her son was killed in the line of duty, how could it be him? So all she could think was that someone was playing a cruel joke on her mind and emotions. She got angry! So the Ruth asked the voice on the other end some questions only her son Clayton would know the answers to. And he answered everyone of them. A short time later, two Army officers arrived at her home and personally assured her that her son, Clayton, was indeed alive. He was only slightly injured and recovering in a hospital. The initial report was a mistake. Talk about going from the depths of sorrow to the mountaintops of joy!

Could Easter be a mistake? Is Easter just some horrible oversight on the part of soldiers, women, and disciples that what they thought was the death of Jesus turns out to be nothing more than a case of mistaken identity?

Not a chance – because God's Word puts us right on the scene. **Last Thursday**, we saw Jesus institute His Supper in the Upper Room. **Last Friday**, we saw Jesus crucified on the cross at Calvary. **Last Friday late afternoon**, we saw Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus' body into the tomb and roll the stone to close it. And today, we see an open tomb with angels inside proclaiming **HE IS NOT HERE; HE IS RISEN!** Talk about going from the depths of sorrow to the mountaintops of joy!

We conclude our long Lenten journey theme today. We've been through the depths of Jesus' suffering for 6½ wks. Now we experience what Jesus told His disciples they would experience when he said:

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

1. You will weep, mourn, and grieve
2. But your grief will turn to joy

1

What makes your hearts smile? Easter company coming and dinner later on? Baskets for the grandkids? Someone told me two day ago, I should smile more. I said “I can't – it's Good Friday!”

But today is Easter. Of all the days of the year, our hearts should be grinning from artery to artery. Of all the days of the year, the alleluias that we farewelled to six weeks ago should be pumping through our veins. Check your pulse, it should be going, “Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah” (*Hallelujah Chorus*).

But I doubt if your spiritual pulse always beats so positively. Our Savior once told his disciples, {v 20} **“I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, YOU WILL WEEP AND MOURN WHILE THE WORLD REJOICES. YOU WILL WEEP, MOURN, & GRIEVE...** Jesus spoke these words just prior to his death. A few days after saying these words, that's exactly what Jesus sees going on among his followers. With the rooster's crow still ringing in his ears, **Peter goes outside and weeps bitterly.** Where do we find **Mary Magdalene** early this morning: **watering the graveside with her tears.** As Jesus stumbled to carry his cross, the daughters of Jerusalem mourned for him.

Why do the Scriptures share such raw emotions? Because that's the reality of this life! We live in a vale of tears, in a world of sorrow. Christians hurt. We weep with sadness. We mourn over losses. We grieve over guilt. But Scripture doesn't have to tell us that, does it? No, the pages of Scripture simply confirm what we see in our own lives. Your heart may be smiling today. You maybe woke up and sang, **“Welcome, Happy Morning!”** But I suspect that wasn't the case every day since last Easter **April 20, 2014.** And I suspect it won't be the case every day until next Easter, **March 27, 2016.**

What caused your tears this year? A job loss or a broken heart? Whose death did you mourn this year? **A parent or grandparent, a spouse, a child or grandchild?** And are you still mourning over that loss years later? What guilt caused you to grieve this year? Earlier we confessed **“I daily fail to do what you command and continually do what you forbid.”** What did we fail to do and what did we continually do? The real question here isn't what pain you have or what's causing your grief. The question is, how do you deal with it?

Jesus had an answer for his disciples. Just before 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”?’”**

Did you catch the key phrase? **“A little while”** 7 times in 3 verses. Jesus is telling them and us, **“Take a step back. See the big picture. Whatever you’re going through, it won’t last long. In a little while, it’ll be over.”** Sometimes we maybe want to sock the person who says that. You’re on mile 21 of a 26 mile marathon and a person sitting in his lawn chair with a cold beer in his hand yells out, **“Just a little while yet,”** you want to say, **“Easy for you to say. Why don’t you run this race yourself and see what ‘a little while yet’ feels like?”**

But it’s different when Jesus says it because Jesus has a different perspective than anyone else. **First of all, he’s all-knowing.** He knows how long our “little whites” are going to be. He knew his disciples wouldn’t see him after they abandoned him, but he also knew he’d see them a week later in the locked room. And he knows exactly how long your little whites will be. Whatever the reason for your grief: **He promises not to let you suffer beyond what you can bear.** Hang in there; it will be just **“a little while.”** And because Jesus is risen and eternally alive, he also knows our troubles are light and momentary compared to the glory that awaits us.

That was impressed upon me and a friend of mine when we attended the funeral of a little guy we’ll call Darren. Darren was just 3 years old when cancer called him home. We sat in the back pew of this packed church. The church bell rang to start the service. But instead of the organ playing and the pastor saying, “Please rise,” for the family, a voice came over the loud speaker. **It was the grieving Father.** Not wanting to face the congregation for fear he wouldn’t be able to say what he wanted to say, he went in to the pastor’s sacristy and spoke through a microphone. It wasn’t the most polished speech in the world, but it was one of two beautiful sermons heard that morning. His voice, *[shaky from public speaking on top of raw emotions]* was solid with confidence: **“Me and the wife just want to thank you all for your loving support. It means so much. But we also want to let you know that today is not a sad day because we got to do something that not every parent gets to do . . . we got to usher Darren all the way to heaven where our Savior took him from our arms into his.”**

Then the pastor preached on the words of our text in the service: **“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me...I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”**

2

I didn’t read that part earlier, did I? **“I TELL YOU THE TRUTH . . . YOUR GRIEF WILL TURN TO JOY.”** I didn’t say “Your grief will be replaced by joy.” But, **“YOUR GRIEF WILL TURN TO JOY.”** That is what Easter is all about. It takes a sad, hopeless situation and Easter 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 now was their source of joy!

Look what Easter does to the grave. Mary’s crying at the tomb. But when Jesus stands next to her and calls her by name, Easter turns that hole in the rock into the rock of her salvation, as it powerfully declares Jesus to be the Son of God and Son of Man **RISEN FROM THE DEAD!** **Easter turned her grief into joy.**

73 years ago today (April 5th) at the 40th anniversary of this congregation, St. Peter members walked up the sidewalk from the old church at the bottom of Grand Ave carrying Bibles, candles, hymnals, and communion vessels into this building where Easter’s joy would be preached. *(Permit me to ask those of you here today who made that walk- to please raise your hand)* **HAPPY 73RD ANNIVERSARY TODAY!** 73 years and still counting, **Easter still turns our grief into joy!**

Instead of the guilt and grief of seeing our sins pinned on the cross, **Easter turns the cross into a gift** where God accepted Christ’s payment for our sins. **You are forgiven – I am forgiven!** **Easter turns that paradise** that Jesus prepared for a thief into a promise prepared for us. **Easter turns our grief** into the sure hope of being reunited with our loved ones in heaven where Jesus wipes every tear from our eyes. **Easter turns our deaths** into a peaceful sleep where our souls enjoy heaven while waiting to be reunited with our glorious bodies on the Last Day. Any way you look at it, **Easter turns our grief into joy.** Let nothing take that away from you.

So what makes you smile today? Company? Ham? Cheesy potatoes? No, check your heart’s pulse: **CHRIST IS RISEN!** **HE IS RISEN INDEED.** **“Hal-le-lu-jah, Hal-le-lu-jah” AMEN**