“Honest Grief and Authentic Joy”
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John 16:16-24

John 16:16
16 Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

This sentence - in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me – will be repeated three more times in our passage today. Let’s try to understand the first time.

Two ideas have been proposed over the years. First, it could mean the death of Jesus, and then the resurrection of Jesus. Second, it could mean the death-resurrection-ascension of Jesus, and then the second coming of Jesus. I lean toward the first proposal since it would the easiest one for the disciples.

The Upper Room Discourse occurred on the Thursday night of Holy Week, but soon in a brief time, Jesus will face arrest, a trial, conviction, crucifixion, death, and burial. He will be gone, and they will not see him for three days: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Then they will see him again as the Risen Jesus. He will be alive.

The disciples decide to talk among themselves. It’s obviously that they don’t get it.

John 16:17-18
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.”

Along the phrase - in a little while – the disciples add another statement by Jesus - because I am going to the Father - which is recorded a few verses earlier.

John 16:7-11
7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.
The disciples don’t have a clue what Jesus was saying about going away and about the Advocate.

A few Sundays ago, I quoted Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, “What’s the Buzz, Tell Me What’s a Happening.”

They didn’t understand, and I truly confess to you, I often don’t understand. I’m no better than the disciples. My lack of obedience tells me I also lack understanding.

Jesus, fully God as well as fully human, knows all things and hears all things, whether spoke out loud or not. He knew the content of their whispers.

**John 16:19**

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’?*

Here’s the fourth and last occurrence of the phrase - in a little while. Thanks be to God. No answer by the disciples is recorded by John.

Sometimes questions can help us. Jesus asks us questions today, and they are not rhetorical.

What are you thinking?
What are you doing?
   Why are you behaving in that way?
   Why are you speaking with that tone of voice?
       Where are you heading?
       Where is your heart?
           Can I join you?
           Can I help you?
               Will you be my friend?
               Will you be willing to let go of your ego?
                   Do you know about my love for you?
                   Do you know I have great thoughts for you?

In the next verses, Jesus answers the question about “in a little while.” Then he provides an example from human life, and puts everything into the context of grief and joy.

**John 16:20**

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.*
The disciples will weep and mourn for two reasons. First, their Master will die on the cross. They will experience both grief and fear. Second, the disciples will desert their Master when he goes the cross. That will bring about more grief about their lack of obedience.

The world - the Jewish leader and the Roman authorities - will rejoice because they put away another religious zealot.

Their grief will become joy because Jesus will rise from the dead. It will be amazing and miraculous, but as real as a woman giving birth to a baby.

**John 16:21**

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.

The analogy is helpful, although as male disciples, they didn’t have a clue about the pain women go through when birth happens.

I was present for all three births of our children. I was in the delivery room and saw the birth, but I did not feel the pain. I saw it and I heard it, but I didn’t feel it.

It’s interesting that Jesus used a female metaphor to explain truth to the male disciples.

Consider for a moment about who is in the Upper Room when Jesus gave this metaphor. If you think that there was only men in the Upper Room, then you need to look around the room for a few moments.

Maybe your mind is trapped by Da Vinci’s painting with Jesus sitting on one side of the Lord’s Table - as though they were posing for a group picture.

*(Picture of Da Vinci’s Last Supper)*

Painted in 1498, you can still see it in Milan, Italy. It’s 15 feet by 29 feet. It’s on a wall, not on a canvas. Because of the painting method he used, the Last Supper started to deteriorate almost instantly, and has required restoration many times, including the most recent controversial one by Pinin Barcilon (from 1979 – 1999) who used watercolors to fill in some gaps of clarity.

I saw another Last Supper in Glendale, California, at Forest Lawn as a young boy with my parents. It’s the same size as the painting in Italy, but it’s a stained glass window. It opened in 1931, and had more Southern California visitors until Disneyland opened in 1955.

*(Picture of Last Supper stained glass window in Forest Lawn)*
Both pictures are clear. All men are on one side of the table, sitting on chairs. Da Vinci ignored the cultural truth about having meals in the first century as well as the scriptural evidence in all three Synoptic Gospels. He had concerns about the mathematical presentation of the painting and the center table served his purposes better.

Here’s one passage for you to observe.

**Matthew 26:20**

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

There’s a better picture of the Upper Room. It’s on the front cover of the bulletin.

Now, look around the room. Who else is in the Upper Room? Who is in the shadows? Who prepared the Passover for the disciples? Did the men prepare their own meal? There is no evidence - culturally, historically, or scripturally - that men prepared meals in the first century.

This means women were present. Consider the list of women who were at the foot of the cross of Jesus (Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:55-56, John 19:25-27). Here’s Mark’s account.

**Mark 15:40-41**

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Women were part of Jesus’ followers since the beginning. Look at this passage from Luke’s Gospel.

**Luke 8:1-3**

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

It’s surprising that John doesn’t account for the women in the Upper Room because he does record Jesus speaking to the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), including the shock of the disciples when they discover Jesus speaking to a Samaritan woman in the daylight. John also records the very first appearance of the Risen Jesus, namely to a woman (Mary Magdalene) instead of John and Peter who arrive first (John 20:1-18) but don’t see Jesus.
So, here’s how I write the rest of the story after Jesus told the giving birth example. The women leaned forward to the men disciples and explained it to them. (And I think Jesus enjoyed the moment and laughed, but of course, that’s my fictional addition to the story. In fact, I think Jesus turned and said to Mary, his mother, “Please have the women explain to the men how much it hurts to give birth to a child.”)

Of course, the birth example by Jesus had a purpose. He wanted to help the disciples understand honest grief and authentic joy, something that all mothers know about.

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.

This grief will occur a short time because they will soon see Jesus as the Risen Jesus - no longer dead but alive – and the sight will give them joy.

The Greek word for joy is quite interesting. I have told you this before, but let me remind you again. Many wonderful Christian words start with joy - chara. If you change the ending to charis, then you have the word is grace. If you add a prefix, then it becomes Eucharist, Holy Communion. Finally, if you add a suffix to Eucharist, then it becomes thanksgiving.

These four Christian words are related: joy, grace, communion, and thanksgiving. It’s no wonder that Jesus says, “No one will take away your joy.”

Listen to how Jesus describes this joy. It’s our last verses for today.

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.

“In that day” means after the resurrection. The disciples will then get to ask God for anything and God will give them whatever they ask in the name of Jesus.

Ask in the name of the Risen Jesus and you will receive. This isn’t the first time Jesus tells us to ask, but it’s the first time Jesus says the phrase “in my name.” Here are three other times.

Mark 11:24
24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Matthew 7:7-8
7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
John 13:13-14
13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Some of these words and phrases really get to me.

Whatever you ask

This is certainly a generous promise by Jesus. The word “whatever” opens the door very widely for our prayers.

In my name

The wideness of “whatever” is focused by asking in the name of Jesus. A relationship with Jesus gives us direction about our asking.

You will receive

The assurance is answered prayer. We will receive. The answer is the reception of what God thinks and what God desires for our lives and what God wants us to do and how God loves us with unfailing love.

Ask

Ask is the open invitation to talk with God in the name of Jesus.

Ask is the simple invitation to give our questions to God without reservations.

Ask is the one word invitation to trust God with all of your concerns and with all of your fears and with all of your worries and with all of your sad songs and with all of your challenges and with all of your disabilities and with all of your failures and with all of your weak moments and with all of your anger and with all of your frustration and with all of your sin and with all of your foolishness and with all of your waywardness.

Ask is the loving invitation to express our grief to God without holding back.

Ask is the word that opens doors to authentic joy that comes to us as true relief and true peace because it starts with honest grief.