

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

From Lament and Mourning to Laughter and Joy

(Easter, 2021)

John 16:16-24; Text: John 20:20

Scripture: John 16:16-24

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

¹⁷At 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'?" ¹⁸They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

¹⁹Jesus 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'?" ²⁰Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹A 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. ²²So 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. ²³In 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. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

Text: John 20:20

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Message:

Reading the Easter story makes me smile...even laugh a bit. It starts with the guards. Ask a child to draw them and you'll notice they are muscular, perhaps bearded, and most of all BIG. With scowls on their face and sharp spears in their hands, these guards are, children would say, just plain scary.

They just stand there – as formidable as the presidents on Mount Rushmore and as impenetrable as Fort Knox - no one would be foolish enough to mess with them.

And then, suddenly, there is an earthquake, and the picture changes dramatically. The ground shakes when a brilliant angel appears and approaches the tomb. The big, burly guards begin to shake and tremble all over: teeth chatter, knees wobble, hands tremble.

One by one, they keel over; they flop to the ground; they become like dead men: One, two, three, and yup, there goes number four too!

And then God adds a final touch. Remember that massive foreboding stone? The angel simply flicks it off to the side with a finger and turns it into a La-Z-Boy recliner for the morning . . .

So much for those mighty guards; only took one angel. Makes me smile every time I think about it! And something happened to death that morning as well...

Easter, Resurrection Day, calls for smiles – especially after a long week for Jesus of humiliation, betrayal, ridicule, suffering and pain, death and a burial...

But along with all our triumphant songs and greetings of "*The Lord is risen; He is risen, indeed!*" Easter calls for time to engage in some hearty **joy**, some healthy **celebration**, and some holy **laughter**.

The quote, "*Laugh, and the world laughs with you*" is transformed on Easter to "*Laugh and all heaven rejoices with you.*"

I can say this with great confidence: Because of Easter, we (you and I) can be assured that we who believe in Jesus Christ will have the **last laugh!** The saying is true: "*The one who laughs last, laughs best...*" In fact, because of Jesus' resurrection, the joy never leaves the hearts of those who know him and know his victory. We're not just waiting to laugh **someday**, we can laugh **today!**

There is an undercurrent of joy and laughter we can carry with us all the way to that last day of full and unstrained rejoicing.

Just for the record, this laughter is not the nervous laughter of **embarrassment**; it is not the response to a funny **joke**; it is not laughter just to break the **tension**. This is the joy of seeing the world's best impression of

power (death) being protected by a bunch of burly guards embarrassed by a intervention of **divine power**.

Laughter is the **primary** expression of a deep inner joy; and is the most contagious of all emotional experiences. It brings people together; it is **contagious!**

This “holy hilarity” might sound strange (out of place) to us; but it shouldn’t be. This is actually just what the Jesus promised: *“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy . . . now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy!”* (**John 16:20,22**)

And then, it happened just as Jesus said it would! It should not be a surprise.

THE REVERSAL

After the arrest of Jesus late that night, his enemies were overjoyed; the disciples were crestfallen.

The religious leaders **celebrated**; rejoiced and laughed. Theirs was a cruel, vicious, scornful, self-gratifying **laughter**. They mocked and insulted Jesus; they laughed him to scorn, especially while he hung on a cross. Theirs was the first laugh.

The disciples, meanwhile, were anxious and **frightened**; they were shocked at this their Rabbi’s arrest, fearful through this trial, and **crushed** at his death. Bewildered and afraid, they scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

They slowly straggled back to the upper room, regrouped, trying to sweep-up the pieces of their shattered dream broken on the rocks of reality. They sat in silence - numb, grief-stricken; their whole world gone dark and gray – fearing they would never hear/see their Rabbi Jesus again.

Scripture offers us three snapshots of that sorrow...

- In **Luke 24:17b**, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus *“stood still, their faces downcast.”*
- **John 20:11** notes, *“Mary stood outside the tomb crying.”*
- **Mark 16:10**, indicates the disciples themselves were *“mourning and weeping.”*

But the resurrection reversed (changed, flipped) everything. They thought Jesus was **dead** and would stay dead. He didn’t. He was **resurrected** by His Father. It was now the disciples turn to rejoice and laugh just as Jesus had promised: *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”* (**Luke 6:21**) And so it was!

We are told that when Jesus appeared and proved to them that it was really him by showing them his hands and side, they were overjoyed (**John 20:20**).

The transformation was sudden; it was dramatic; it was amazing. The one who was dead was no longer dead! Death had been conquered!

Do you think they walked around that upper room **silent** and **restrained**? Do you think they continued to whisper in fear of what the authorities could/would do? I don't think so! The scene I imagine begins with jaws dropped out of stunned shock and thunderstruck awe that Jesus was alive. Risen!

This was initially news so unbelievable; they couldn't believe it when the women first reported it (**Luke 24:11** – *"They did not believe the woman because their words seemed to them like nonsense."*). But their incredulity quickly blossomed into a delirious joy when they discovered it was true. There were outbursts of jubilation, tear-filled embraces, celebrations of vindication, and . . . laughter. Yes, theirs was the laughter of joy; **pure** celebrative, unrestrained, **joy**.

This is the kind of joy **Abraham** felt as he walked back down the mountain with Isaac by his side. Abraham too, had just witnessed nothing less than a resurrection. The son he thought would be **dead** was **alive**! (**Hebrews 11:19** – *"Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead"*). Abraham literally returned home with **laughter**! (Isaac's name, you may remember, means, lit., "son of laughter").

This righteous laughter can be heard throughout Scripture – if we just listen (read) carefully! **Miriam's** dancing at the Red Sea; **David** escaping Saul's traps three times; **Daniel** stepping out of a lion's den unscratched – the glee is there every time! All these people (and more) tasted the goodness of God – the goodness that brings deep joy, the elation of the last laugh, the best laugh.

The silent, numb, grief-stricken upper room came alive with a sense of victory that resulted in holy rejoicing that filled the upper **room** and eventually the **world**.

THE RESERVATIONS

It should not be surprising that we find those who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus quickly and excitedly calling all who believe their witness to share in the joy. We are emphatically told to rejoice to be exceedingly glad, to make a melody in our hearts, to count even trials as joy, and to share the Good News

The mourning disciples soon turned into enthusiastic **evangelists**, committed **disciple-makers**, passionate **world-changers**.

But not so fast. What really is there to laugh about? Did the resurrection of Jesus really usher in the “time to laugh” of Ecclesiastes 3:4? Some may find this nuance insensitive. This seems like no time for laughter; in fact, laughter seems to diminish the significance of what is really happening.

What business do God’s people have “laughing” in a world like ours, a world full of things that are not “**laughing matters.**” Should we be laughing while our planet is awash in pollution, while racism and injustice are rampant; while families are collapsing, we’re in a pandemic, the government’s debt is incomprehensible, when church attendance is declining.

Who would even dare suggest we “rejoice” while planes drop from the sky; while road rage, earthquakes, tsunamis, fires and tornadoes kill thousands; and when gunmen walk into retail outlets and randomly kill bystanders?

Should we be talking about joy while people we know/love are in pain at the loss of a parent/spouse/child/friend/neighbor/church member, the loss of health, the loss of a job/income/business.

For many, even the suggestion of laughing can be painful when a tragedy hits close to home: a death in the family, a lost job, a debilitating injury.

There are obviously many situations where a call to laughter seems **out of place**... One doesn’t suggest holy laughter during an intervention, when visiting someone in intensive care, or in the midst of family or congregational conflict... One does not go to the bedside of a dying friend and suggest holy laughter...

Or does one? Because of Jesus, we can rejoice on Easter. In fact, we must! But we do not rejoice obliviously or laugh lightly or with our eyes closed; but neither should we continue to live on the wrong side of Easter as if we have no hope. No, we celebrate with our eyes wide open; but we celebrate – as we should.

THE REASONS

There are multiple reasons to rejoice! More than time allows this morning... Easter reminds us that all our afflictions are momentary; the impact of sin’s reign is numbered; and one day, our earthly limitations will fly away! It is only a matter of time and we will be completely whole again.

My grandfather lost much of his hand in a corn picker. His faith in Jesus assured him that one day he would be given a new, indestructible, **forever body**, as the resurrected Christ received. His partial hand provided him

perspective on this life reminding him daily that not only would his handicap one day disappear, it is short-lived.

Corrie's struggle for breath, Mark, Rog, and my niece Amy's recent deaths (and separation from us) are all short-lived – temporal, momentary.

I have no doubt that when that moment came for my grandfather, it was not unlike the lame man in **Acts 3** who at his “resurrection” jumped up and began to walk! He then entered “the gates of thanksgiving” praising God.

Just knowing that day is fast approaching makes room in our lives for joy even though life is no picnic, we may be walking in pain, on crutches, or in the shadow of death; we may be victims of injustice, racism, sexism, or prejudice; or we may be addicted to pornography, drugs or alcohol, or gambling. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are all on our way to wellness. And those who know it, and believe it, can be irrepressibly cheerful – now/today!

If we carry Easter's joy in our heart, we too can rejoice and be glad.

It's one thing to rejoice over the prospect of a new body; but there is a deeper reason for unrestrained joy at Easter: Easter gives us a new identity. This is precisely what the Father made available to us raising his Son from the dead.

Paul plainly says (cf. **Romans 4:25**) that the Father raised the Son from the dead for our **justification** (i.e., to change our status with the Father).

On Easter, the Father announced that sinful people could be justified (i.e., made right with God), and then he showed us by raising Jesus from the dead! That was a momentous life changing, destiny altering announcement.

By raising Jesus, God declared that Jesus' payment for our sin **fully** and **completely satisfied** God's justice.

The issue on which our destiny as sinful rebels hung was not only on whether Jesus would lay down his life in our place, but also on whether God would accept that laid-down life as full and complete payment for all our sin. His emphatic answer came on Easter morning: YES!

Easter is the grand announcement that God has fully exonerated us (all those who trust his Son), **dropped** every charge against us and **released** us from needing to pay for any eternal damages our sin may have caused – ever! We are completely saved.

There is nothing we need to do or could do to add to what has been done for us. We're fully forgiven; fully free from sin; fully pleasing to the Father, forever. We're completely back into God's family and there is nothing we need to do beyond what Christ has already done for us.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God said, *“I am pleased with the payment that has been made. You are off the guilt hook forever. I fully accept you as my child!”*

Easter also assures us of our final destiny; his resurrection guarantees ours.

I’ve been in a funeral home when two families lost children unexpectedly. One room was filled with uncontrollable sobbing and audible moaning; the other was clouded with sadness periodically interrupted by laughter. One room had no promise and was void of hope; the other had hope and a promise: the separation is only momentary; one family didn’t know Jesus; the other family loved Jesus and knew he loved them.

Saying “goodbye” **temporarily** and saying “goodbye” **forever** are fundamentally and dramatically different; the former far easier than the later. Libere goes to Burundi, my kids/grandkids fly to Arizona, Mark and Rog and Cliff get called home – they are gone; we are separated; but it’s only a momentary time before we’re together again – so it will be okay.

So in spite of our circumstances (whatever they may be), we can rejoice – because we have read the **last chapter**, we have seen the big picture, we know how it **ends** – it will be our greatest joy!

Christ will return; his promise in **John 16:22** will be fulfilled a second time: *“Again, I will see you and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”*

And we, who rejoice and laugh at the end will laugh best, because we will rejoice and laugh forever.

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