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Sadness turned to joy

Bible Reading: John 16:16-24

Jesus said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then in a little while you will see me.'

Some of the disciples asked among themselves, 'What does this mean? He tells us that in a little while we will not see him, and then after a little while we will see him; and he also says "It is because I am going to the Father." What does this "little while" mean? We don't know what he is talking about!'

Jesus saw that they wanted to question him about this, so he said to them, 'I said, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then in a little while you will see me." Is this what you are asking about among yourselves? I am telling you the truth: you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will be sad, but your grief will turn to joy. When a woman is about to give birth to a child, she has pain because her time has come, but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. That is how it is with you. Now you are sad, but I will see you again and your hearts will be filled with joy – the kind of joy that no one can take away from you.'

When that day comes, you will no longer ask me anything. I am telling you the truth – the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.'

Reflection

Many of the things that Jesus said are not easy to understand. Each word may be simple enough but put them together in sentences and it makes us stop and think. We are not alone in this. Even the first disciples – who had spent three years with Jesus and had the benefit of living in the same country and culture – did not always know what he was talking about!

This conversation with Jesus is a good example. 'A little while' appears seven times in a few sentences as he tries to prepare his friends for what lies ahead, when their world falls apart as they go through a time of desperate grief and loss but with joy round the corner when they see him alive again. As the pain of childbirth gives way to a joy that surpasses the memory of the pain endured, so they will experience a sudden joy arising from catastrophe that will upend their lives and lead to a new intimacy in relationship with the Father. Jesus tells them that they will no longer need to 'ask' him anything (in the sense of asking questions) as they will have a new understanding of Jesus,

clarity about the meaning of his death and resurrection, and the help and indwelling of the promised Holy Spirit. They will now 'ask' (or petition) the Father in the name of Jesus as they take the revelation of God's love out into the world in word and deed.

Seeing, or not seeing, family and friends for what may be 'a little while' or a whole lot longer has resonances for today. Government guidance and advice on who we should see, where and when, for how long, and at what distance can leave us feeling bewildered and distressed. We can recognise the confusion of the disciples in today's reading as we too look forward to a time when 'We'll meet again' even if we 'don't know where, don't know when...'

We do know that our relationship with God is secure, that there is hope of new life (and we can see God's world bursting into life all around us in the countryside, fields and gardens), and grief will turn to joy. Meanwhile we have the task of sharing God's love and praying in Jesus' name 'Thy kingdom come'.

Prayer – an Irish Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you, may the wind be always at your back.
may the sunshine warm upon your face, the rain fall soft upon your fields
and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.
Amen.

Response

- As we gradually ease out of 'lockdown' there will be some people who need to remain shielded and may feel even more isolated and lonely. Identify two or three people you know in this situation and contact them today.
- Look out for local stories of hope, where God's love is being shown in words and actions. Share these as widely as you can.
- The Rural Coffee Caravan in Suffolk is not able to visit villages as usual, but has been collecting stories of kindness. Go to ruralcoffeecaravan.org.uk/cascade-of-kindness to read some of these. Could one of these examples be adapted to your context? If so, think about how you could make it work.
- Join a charity that is working in an area that you feel passionately about (either geographically or an area of life /work) to strengthen its voice. Its work will be needed more than ever over the next few years
- Read Psalm 93 (set for today) and rejoice that the Lord is King!

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