

April 6, 2020 Devotion – “Loss”

John 16:19-20 The Message (MSG)

¹⁹⁻²⁰ “Jesus knew they were dying to ask him what he meant, so he said, “Are you trying to figure out among yourselves what I meant when I said, ‘In a day or so you’re not going to see me, but then in another day or so you will see me’? Then fix this firmly in your minds: You’re going to be in deep mourning while the godless world throws a party. You’ll be sad, very sad, but your sadness will develop into gladness.” © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

Today our opening prayer is taken from “Feasting On The Word – Lenten Companion”. ©2014 Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY

Let us pray,

“Surprising God, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ you make all things new. Long ago you called your church to a love beyond all social and cultural difference and gave them the gift of your Holy Spirit to open their hearts to enact such love. Give us that same spirit of openness, that we too might discern new directions in our day for your dream to reconcile and heal all creation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Yesterday began our final walk in Lent. The road ahead will be the most difficult because we travel through Holy Week. The idea of Palm Sunday is parade-like, everyone is happy and excited. Who doesn’t love a parade? The happiness is cut short as Jesus takes each step towards the cross, his final destination.

We continue today with the idea of aging faithfully no matter what age we may be. I read something a young friend of mine wrote on Facebook; it was her diary entry for the day, and she wanted to share it. It concerned loss in her life. She is a high school senior who has been home-schooled her entire life. She is about to graduate and hopefully will attend college in the fall. I say hopefully because “these days” that we are living through make things unsure right now.

There is a word that brings fear or resistance when heard, C-H-A-N-G-E, change. When we hear it, we think we are going to lose something, the somethings we cling to, the somethings or someone we hold tightly to. Death brings loss. Family or friends die, and we mourn this loss, a loss that is carried throughout our lives. I lost someone when I was a newlywed. My god-sister Claudia was killed in an auto-accident. Years later when my mother was in the last few weeks of life, I spoke to my godmother. Carolyn was my mothers’ best friend from childhood throughout their adult lives. She told me that the grief never goes away, we just learn to handle it better. This is true in some respects. I still miss Claudia who died way too young. I still miss my parents, my grandparents, and other people in my life who are no longer with me. The change that happened when they died opened me up to a new beginning. Just as my young friend wrote in her diary about all the changes that are happening in her life as well as other seniors about to graduate, or the change that is happening in our lives in “these days” of staying home. Change and loss is hanging over our heads and it is up to us to decide how we want to deal with it. Know that God understands our grief and pain, God understands our feelings of loss. Through the loss however there is a new beginning.

Some of us have faired well in the “home-boundness” and some of us have had difficulty. In our scripture today I chose to read from The Message translation because it gives us a bit of background to where Jesus is and what is happening.

John 16:20 in The New International Version (NIV) reads:

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.”

We are weeping and mourning right now because we have lost our freedom to do what we want to do, those things that make us feel complete. I understand, I do not like being home all day. I do not like being home alone all day and night. Our pets are great companions, but they are pets. And then I realize that I am fortunate because Bruce will come home, and I won't be alone anymore. My current loss will turn to joy.

Jesus told the disciples that their grief will turn to joy. How can that be? Someone dies, someone leaves, change comes pushing into our lives, how can joy possibly come from this? In the case of Jesus' death, he did return, he rose from the dead. However, at this point the disciples didn't know that or understand it. After verse 20, Jesus continues on, using the anguish a woman goes through during childbirth and how after the baby is born, the woman forgets the pain and only has joy in the birth of their child.

After all this pain we are going through, will there be a time of joy? This is something we need to think about. How are we going to react to the stay-at-home law when it is lifted? Will we run out and hug everyone we see? Will we gather in large groups and have a party? I hope not. Yes, you heard me, I hope not. What have we learned from this loss in our lives? How will we put this loss into concrete ways of living our life faithfully?

Change brings new beginnings. I suggest that we begin to think about new beginnings, what should we as individuals do in these opportunities of new beginnings? I have read many things on Facebook and the internet, as I am sure you have also. There are some creative ideas out there, people turning the lemons of this virus into lemonade. There is the joy! We are learning new things, new ways of communication, new ways of running our households, new and old ways of being family. Please do not throw them aside when the “stay home” order is lifted!

The other area we need to look at is the church and the changes that have happened, the responses that are happening each day. This devotion time grew out of my desire to connect visually and audibly with you. Talk about learning curves! Thank heaven for our sons Derek and Carel, they have guided me through this technology stuff!

But we are still grieving and mourning, and we wait for the joy. Jesus died and the disciples grieved, they went home and stayed home. But three days later Jesus rose from the dead and the grief turned to joy. Our loss of being able to do things outside our homes is real, but we are being given opportunities to think about how we will respond to the joy that is just around the corner. How will we personally and as a church respond to the joy that is just around the corner? I encourage you to think and pray about how we will respond to the joy of the new beginnings that are being given to us. I encourage you to think and pray about the things you have learned, the things that have changed you and your life. I encourage you to talk with others, and with me; together our grief will turn to joy.

This is Holy Week, and we are walking the Passion scripture. On Sunday we will celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour. We are being given a story we know well, however, if there is someone hearing the story for the first time or someone who now embraces the story as true, this will change lives forever. How do we put this life-changing truth of the resurrection into our lives at this moment? How do we respond in joy? Oh, how I wish we could hear one another right now so we could explore these questions together!

I miss you and pray for each of you. Together we will make this journey with Jesus and we ***will find and experience the promised joy!***

Let us pray:

Almighty God, it is true that we have experienced great loss in our lives, but this loss that we are all going through brings fear and uncertainty into our lives. We are thankful that You are always with us, always hearing our prayers, our cries of grief and sadness. We thank you for loving us, for loving us through these days of darkness. Help us continue to move forward, to embrace the opportunities of new ideas, help us to press on. Amen

Pastor Linda