

John 16: 16-33

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

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So, when I read this week’s text, my mind kept taking tangents when I got to verse 21 – that whole birthing baby bit.

First, my mind went to the birth of our son.

Then, it went to those stories you hear about dumb things said in the delivery room.

A quick Google search provided the following dumb things said around the birth of a child...

This first one takes place as the couple is leaving for the hospital, “When I went into labor, we were getting ready to leave and my husband packed a pair of scissors. 'Do I need to bring them, or does the hospital have some for me to use to cut the umbilical cord?'"

The next ones occur in the delivery suite:

“That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

"Can I turn the TV up? I can't hear over your moaning."

After 11 hours of labor and an epidural that didn’t work, imagine hearing this, “Honey, it can’t hurt that bad.”

The nurse asked me if he was in the military, because he kept repeating, 'OK, let's regroup.' I said no, but he's going to be in the hall if he keeps saying that."

Imagine after 15 hours of labor, your partner saying to you, “I think I’m just going to go home quickly and take a nap. Text me when anything changes.”

"I don't think I want to do this again," he said.

Although I don’t know if this one has been ever uttered in the delivery suite, I’m guessing it would not be warmly greeted just after giving birth, “What do we want to name our next child?”

Jesus likens his return, his resurrection following his death, and what that will mean for the disciples, to a woman in labor.

“Very truly, I tell you,” he says, *[this opening phrase we might have picked up in Johannine writing indicative of a new teaching a new lesson Jesus is giving the disciples]* ... “you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn to joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain,

because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (16.20-22)

We know Jesus to be speaking of his death here because the verbs used *klaio* – “to weep” & *threneo* – “to mourn” describe lamentation & grieving associated with death. They recall words like Jeremiah 22:10, “Do not weep for him who is dead, nor bemoan him; weep rather for him who goes away, for he shall return no more to see his native land.” Or, early in John 11:33, the events surround Lazarus’ death, “When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”

Jesus promises the disciples sorrow over his departure will be transformed into joy when they see him again at his resurrection.

He does so by offering this short sermon illustration around a mother’s delivery pain which shifts to joy upon seeing her child.

In so doing, John’s Jesus is drawing upon a wealth of Old Testament imagery.

The metaphor of child birth describes the in-breaking of God’s salvation.

Isaiah 26:17 – God’s people awaiting deliverance by God –

Isaiah 66:7-17 – envisions the restoration of Jerusalem –

Both of which use childbirth as a communal metaphor – evoking the experience of God’s people as they move from suffering to renewed joy.

And, in a sense, isn’t childbirth about community? When a child is born we realize that 1 + 1 doesn’t equal 2 – rather 1 + 1 = 3 or 4 or 5 or ...

Jesus is giving his disciples hope for the future – before they even know to ask the question “Where do we go from here?” – Jesus is shedding light into the darkness.

When John uses the word *lype* – “pain” is it unusual as a descriptor for childbirth pain as it usually refers to emotional not physical pain. Thus, John’s Jesus is connecting the disciples’ immediate situation to Jesus’ departure.

When speaking of the woman’s time of delivery as “her hour” – John’s Jesus is evoking a connection to Jesus’ hour (that hour this gospel has been moving toward from the very beginning – Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension) – it is also a connect to the anticipated eschatological (end-time) hour.

When John describes the woman’s ordeal in labor as *thilipsis* – “anguish” it is normally translated ‘tribulation’ and used in apocalyptic contexts to describe the suffering and persecution the community will endure in advance of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom.

John’s Jesus then is describing the end-time transformation that will occur within the faith-full community which will spring forth as a result of Jesus’ death.

The disciples will become a new people...a people of joy...

Jesus is getting ready to leave his friends – he’s speaking to them in what scholars refer to as The Farewell Discourse – he is getting them ready for life without him being physically present “in the flesh” – and yet – he promises them to not be gone for too long...

The disciples’ sorrow will transform into joy at Jesus’ resurrection.

We’ll see it later in John’s Gospel when the Easter stories verify Jesus’ promised joy!

Mary ceases weeping (John 20.16).

Disciples rejoice (John 20.20).

There is also a bit of deliberate allusion going on here which harkens back to that Isaiah 66 passage – Isaiah 66:14, “You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.”

Jesus speaks a statement of permanence about the disciples’ joy.

The resurrection will irreversibly change the disciples’ life course.

Jesus promises them hope – before even they know they need it!

More definitively, Jesus promises them something the likes of which they’ve never known before – peace!

The world’s power over the disciples is transformed because of Jesus.

In the face of worldly persecution, the disciples can still have peace.

“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16.33)

This is faith’s definitive statement.

Enduring Peace & Joy in spite of present sorrow – these are the end-time, eschatological gifts that Jesus’ resurrection promises & ensures.

The movement from present sorrow to future joy is possible & guaranteed because of Jesus’ victory in his hour.

Jesus’ unshakeable confidence and the peace He promises is what provides the grounds for Christian hope.

Hope is not idle speculation nor is it wishful expectation about the future.

Faith-full hope is the conviction, grounded in the victory of Jesus’ death and resurrection, that the present & the future belong to God – as a result – all things are possible.

When one lives in hope, the present moves toward the promises and possibilities of the future, and the future transforms the sorrows and seeming impossibilities of the present.

Darkness, Death & Decay do not win.

As people of faith, let us not forget:

Our life;

Our joy;

Our hope is found in a Jewish man from Nazareth named Jesus...

Our life;

Our joy;

Our hope is grounded in the one whom the ground could not hold down...

Our lives;

Our joys;

Our hopes & our prayers are placed in the one whom we call Savior.

The one who declares,

“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16.33)

“Very truly, I tell you,” Jesus says, “you will weep and mourn ... you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy ... So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16. 20, 22)

Given everything going on in the world today, why is it that we still bring life into this world?

Perhaps it’s because a baby reminds us that we still have hope for this world in which we live.

A hope that is grounded in the one who has said, “Take courage; I have conquered the world!”

Alleluia & Amen.