

Joy in Jesus

John 16:16-24

So Samson was sweet on a little Philistine gal - serious enough to speak with his folks about arranging a marriage. They didn't like it because she was a Philistine and worshipped the gods and so forth but Samson would not let this go and so the negotiations toward a marriage were initiated. One day as Samson was on the way to see his gal he ran into a lion on the trail and the Spirit came upon him and he killed the lion with his bare hands. He left the lion right where he killed it (which might have put it off the trail and into the bush). On another trip to see her he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion (Samson may have been revisiting the scene of the battle in order to relish his triumphant feat of killing a lion with his bare hands) and he found that bees had nested in the carcass of the lion. This was icing on the cake (or honey in the carcass) and so he scooped up a handful and took it with him, no doubt lifted in spirit by his unexpected sugar high. He even shared some with his parents when he returned home but did so without telling where he got it (since the hive was in the carcass of a dead animal the honey would have been considered unclean by the Jews) Things proceeded and Samson's wedding day arrived. During the subsequent feast of 7 days, Samson told a riddle and made a bet that none of the 30 young men who were at the feast would be able to solve it. The riddle went like this, "Out of the eater came something to eat and out of the strong came something sweet." The young men were stumped and immediately started putting pressure on Samson's new wife to get him to tell the meaning of the riddle. For the entire 7 days of the feast Samson's new wife was in tears over the riddle and Samson's reluctance to confide in her. You could just hear her sobbing, "Samson, darling, if you really love me, if you trust me, then why won't you tell me the riddle? Finally, on the seventh day of the feast Samson broke under the pressure and told the meaning to his wife, who immediately told the young men. Just before the sun went down on that seventh day, they gave the answer, "What is sweeter than honey? And

what is stronger than a lion?" So, Samson lost his bet and many consequences followed.

Jesus told something of a riddle to the disciples as He continued His talk with them in the garden. He said, "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again, a little while and you will see Me, because I go to My Father." With Jesus' riddle there was no undercurrent of ill will as there was in the Samson story. Jesus did not tell His riddle with a purpose that was against the disciples but it was instead a device meant to make His message memorable. He knew that they would look back and remember this riddle with affection and tenderness as they thought of the many ways that Jesus worked to get them ready for their hour of suffering. The riddle became a love gift they learned to treasure but at the time Jesus told it, they just wanted to solve it and they did not know how.

John's account of this conversation demonstrates just how deeply the disciples were intrigued by the riddle. He does this by repeating the riddle word for word, three times in four verses. He also has the disciples asking one another for their take on the riddle but with no ideas about how to solve it. Jesus knew that they were hot and heavy in a discussion about it and so He added to the mystery. He asked them if they were talking together about the riddle and then said, "Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." Expanding on this theme even further, Jesus said, "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."

Here, Jesus came to the interpretation of the riddle whether or not they were able then to get it. "Therefore you now have sorrow;" ("A little while and you will not see Me") "but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." ("And again, a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to My Father.")

Clearly, Jesus was speaking prophetically of His death and resurrection and specifically to the disciples own experience of what He was to suffer and then of

their experience of the great triumph that He would win over sin and death when He rose from the grave. Jesus' death would be to their loss. They would lose Him and everything that they had come to attach to Him. Dreams of kingdom realization, hopes for victory and vindication, the pride and station they had gained by being close to Jesus. They faced an inevitable return home to life as it used to be. They had experienced so much better and there was nothing in them that wanted to go back. They left everything behind when they answered the call to follow Jesus and now they were to see every sacrifice they had made appear to have been in vain. There would be many scoffers and "I told you so-ers."

But, Jesus' resurrection would change all of this so dramatically that it is really beyond the capacity of anyone who wasn't there to comprehend or fathom the emotion and astonishment of those who were. Having experienced the depths of utter loss and complete devastation. They now experienced a complete reversal. Their awareness of the meaning of what they were living remained limited in the immediate aftermath of the resurrection. But, like the experience of heat or warmth after extreme cold, or a drink of cold water after extreme thirst, or rest after extreme exhaustion, or making up after a bitter argument, They had a dead Jesus who was now alive. All of their loss had been turned into gain. Every regret now no longer applied. It was the most dramatic of new beginnings. The word, "joy" is not enough. Peter expanded on the thought with, "Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

Which brings up another possibility, could there be a second interpretation of Jesus' riddle? Some have asked if the riddle could not also describe the experience of believers who "sorrow" now in the wake of Jesus' absence since His ascension but who also anticipate the joy that will be known by all who participate in His second coming. Jesus' promise makes His coming certain but we who anticipate that day can only imagine (but not yet grasp) the level of joy and exhilaration that will be known to every disciple from the days of the 12 until now. We do not sorrow now. Jesus is alive. He did rise from the dead. By means of the Holy Spirit He lives in our hearts. But everything we have now is nothing compared to then.

But Jesus gave still more to the disciples and to us. "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." With these words Jesus connected the asking of the disciples, of all disciples, with the forward movement of God's work in the world. Asking in Jesus' name is asking for what He wants. It is like signing His name to your request. This will only work if He is in agreement with what you ask. Listen again to the Lord's prayer. Ask for what He asked. "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

But, Jesus promised an answer. He promised to deliver. He promised a "Yes!" And the experience of asking and receiving brings joy. How much more the experience of asking and receiving from God?

In the end, Jesus' riddle declares to us His intention that we experience joy in a measure and with such intensity that there is no other way to have this than to get it this way. Enter into the drama of death and resurrection. Know the tension of the already and the not yet. Seek the will of the Savior and then boldly ask for all you know that He wants to do. Now, rest in the joy of His assurance and love.