

19th September - Morning Worship
Grief and Joy - John 16:16-33

So, just to remind ourselves, over the past few weeks, we have been hearing Jesus' last words to His disciples after the last supper and before they headed out onto the garden, where He would be arrested, although the disciples didn't know that, obviously!

Last week, we heard about Jesus telling the disciples about the Holy spirit, the love that flows between the Father and Son, shared with them and with us.

They have been told about the coming gift of the comforter and the counsellor - and yet they didn't seem to really get what Jesus was saying.

And now, in this final section of His talk, Jesus tries to prepare His disciples for what is about to happen.

He says, in verse 16, "In a little while you will see me no more and then a little while after you will see me."

Without the benefit of hindsight, this must have been confusing but He was talking about His crucifixion and death (you will see me no more) and His resurrection (you will see me)

In verse 20, Jesus told them that they would "weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."

Apparently the word we have translated as weep doesn't do justice to the original word. Loud wailing and howling in despair would apparently be a better translation, so not a genteel sob into a hankie, then.

The world rejoiced while the disciples wept.

- the world's values were and very often still are opposite from ours - as Christians we must always expect to be seen as misfits (because we actually don't fit into the world's mould or model) and we will always, or at least should always, stand out from the crowd.

But Jesus is promising them that through their grief, they will experience a new relationship with God.

In the past they have always met with God the Father through an intermediary, a priest or teacher or even Jesus Himself.

But because Jesus died they, and we, can know God the Father themselves and talk to Him themselves!

Revolutionary and almost unbelievable!

It is clear that the disciples' faith wasn't perfect, far from it, but they needed to grow in their faith as they lived their lives following Jesus - and we need to do the same.

If we wait for our calling to be clear and unequivocal before we do anything, then in all probability we will spend most of our lives waiting and doing nothing of value for God and certainly not what we have been individually created to do.

We need to listen to God to try to determine something, give it a go and see what happens. To quote the title of a wonderful book "if you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat".

Jesus' crucifixion brought great sorrow but became a source of joy which can never be taken away.

Before Jesus's death the disciples asked many anxious earthly questions, but with His death and the coming of the Holy Spirit, they can ask in His name, not anxiously or fearfully, but confidently in love, because their status had changed – they and we are children of God the Father.

Only through knowing the holy spirit is the incredible reality of prayer opened up for the first disciples and for us.

It's been 18 months since I last stood here in front of you all, and what an 18 months it's been! A time the like of which none of us have experienced before and I think it's fair to say a time we would rather not have to ever experience again.

There has been grief, and for many there is still much to grieve for, but I believe that we are now heading into an opportunity for, if not joy, at least hope!

Jesus used the image of childbirth to explain the concept of grief and joy. Childbirth, I am reliably informed, is an event with involved great pain, as well as a sizable serving of anxiety, frustration and exhaustion. But at the end of it, is the absolute joy of new life. Let's face it, it is a measure of the vastness of that joy that many, many mothers have more than one child!

The timescale for childbirth is known and can be measured, although I suspect there might be moments when time slows down.... But with other life events which involve or lead to grief, there is no predictable timescale.

Many of us have experienced the death or loss or abandonment of a loved one and, although no two people will deal with this loss in the same way, the grief is huge, sometimes almost to the point of being overwhelming.

And yet, even beyond grief that cannot be measured or contained, there will be joy - it might not be the joy that you had planned or imagined, nor might it come quickly or easily, but the one absolute certainty is that you can have confidence in the fact that, even though Jesus doesn't usually have a magic wand to fix us, He will never, ever abandon us in our struggles. He will always be there walking beside us and sometimes carrying us when the going is just too tough and our own strength is all gone.

I know that to be the truth, as I have been there myself.

And I also know that God will surround us with people to journey with us through our grief. We are not alone.

There are people in our church family who will support us in prayer and in practical ways, but that can only happen if we are willing to be open about our struggles - I don't mean shout it from the rooftops, but quietly talk to one or two honestly and openly.

God's church is not built on people's strength but on God's ability and willingness to use people even in their weakness and fallibility.

Jesus told his disciples, and tells us, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."