**King’s Harbor Church**

***Genuine Joy in an Imperfect World***

**John 16:16-24**

December 10-11, 2016; The Third Sunday of Advent

Kevin Springer

At the birth of Jesus, the angel who appeared to the shepherds said, “I bring you good news of **great** **joy** that will be **for all the people**.” So it’s not surprising that the apostle Paul wrote, **“Always be joyful”** in **1 Thessalonians 5:16.**

For many of us Christmas is the *favorite* season of the year.

But for others this is a *sad* season; joy is the farthest thing from our hearts. Following Christ doesn’t insulate you and me from experiencing deep sorrows; I don’t need to tell you this. Christ himself was “a man of sorrows acquainted with grief” (**Isaiah 53:3**). *And grief comes from a variety of sources.*

***The Sources of Grief…***

**Bad stuff that shouldn’t happen**. Much of the sadness in our lives is self-inflicted. But there are bad things that happen to us that we didn’t bring on ourselves. So we wonder: **Can joy really happen in this world?**

**Good stuff that doesn’t happen.** *Any* of life’s *unmet* *expectations*, which is exactly what the disciples were facing when Jesus spoke his post-Last-Supper Farewell Address in **John 14-16**, where he taught them the secret of lasting joy in the face of shattered dreams. The disciples thought that Jesus had come to Jerusalem a week earlier on Palm Sunday as a Conquering King; instead, in a few hours he would be arrested and crucified as a Suffering Servant.

Jesus said that he was leaving them and returning to his Father. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). But he added that they would be better off because he was sending the Holy Spirit to teach and empower them to bear witness. He also warned that the world would hate them, reject and persecute them. Toward the end of his Discourse, we come to our passage on joy for today:

**John 16:16-24 (ESV)**

*You can’t wait for perfect circumstances to experience God’s joy, because we don’t live in a world of perfect circumstances*. **For joy to work, it’s got to work in an imperfect world.** And that’s what the message of Christmas is all about. **God came into an ugly world, and he revealed the secret to joy.**

Now you can choose to be discouraged or angry or cynical. But the message of Christmas is, because Jesus came, you can be a joyful, because there’s a lot to be joyful about. **Genuine joy must work in a real world with real problems.** And this is the kind of joy Jesus talked about having when the disciples were about to face their greatest sorrow.

***The secrets to experiencing joy in an imperfect world?***

**First, when life doesn’t make sense, ask God to sort things out:** In **16:16** Jesus says, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” Jesus didn’t make sense, because it *was* a confusing statement. A “little while”—literally a *mikron*—you’ll see me “no longer”—then a “little while” you’ll see me! Huh?

The disciples had questions. But instead of asking him what *he* meant, the disciples asked (literally *sought*) each other. Isn’t that what we do? Jesus, of course, knew what they were thinking; he knows what *we* are thinking too.

Jesus answered. In **16:20**, he said (this is my paraphrase), “Here’s the solemn truth: You’ll weep and mourn—that’s what you do when a loved one dies—and the world will celebrate, because they’ll think they won when they kill me. You are about to be plunged into a short, sharp and intensely painful period (a *mikron*) when I am taken away. You will be overcome with sorrow, but after a short time I will come back to you and your sorrow will turn into joy that will never be taken from you.” **If you want durable joy, ask God for it!**

**Second, think about a woman giving birth to a baby—her sorrow is for a little while, then quickly forgotten.** Jesus likely was thinking of his own mother, Mary.

In **16:22** Jesus spells it out: Like a woman giving birth you have sorrow now, but when you see me again you will celebrate. All this is happening because **With Jesus’ death and resurrection the new world is being born out of the womb of the old world**. When Jesus was born of Mary 2000 years ago, it was so we could be reborn to a new world that knows joy.

*Here’s the point:* Jesus isn’t simply saying, “There’s trouble coming, but it’ll be alright afterwards.” He’s saying, “I’m leaving, but when I return a new world will have been born. And the Holy Spirit will remind you of all these things. And you will see me and I will see you.”

**Third,** **we now have direct access to the Father, so we can ask him for anything anytime to get complete, full joy.** The disciples had been asking Jesus a lot of questions, but they hadn’t been requesting anything from him. Now, they (we) have direct access to the Father. *“Ask, and it will be given.”* Don’t have joy? **ASK!**

We have a new source of joy because, despite our circumstances, we share in Christ’s work. We are his friends! Now we ask *in his name*—which had not happened until *after* his resurrection and ascension. This is a new type of asking, a new intimacy with God. It’s a two-way communication. We can hear from God with understanding, and we can pray to God according to his purposes (“in Jesus name”). So a key to joy is *listening* to God, and listening starts with *humility*.

Up to the resurrection, Jesus said that he prayed to his Father on behalf of his people. After the resurrection, we have direct, instant, immediate and valued access to the living God, who is the source of our joy. We have the same access that Jesus has, because he opened the way for us to his Father. And that is why Jesus came to earth at Christmas: To show us his Father, in whose “presence there is fullness of joy” (**Psalm 16:11**).

**Study/Discussion Questions**

**John 16:16-24**

1. Is Christmas a happy or sad time of year for you. Explain why.
2. Read John 16:20. Do you suffer from the effects of unfulfilled dreams? Have you ever asked God to sort it/them out? What have you learned?
3. Read John 16:22. Pastor Kevin said, “With Jesus’ death and resurrection, the new world is being born out of the womb of the old world.” What do you think he means by that? How does this truth affect you?
4. Read 16:24. In the past month, have you asked God for something that he gave you? What was it? Did you experience joy?
5. Read John 16:23. Pastor Kevin said, “In Jesus, you have direct, instant, immediate and valued access to the Father.” Does that describe your relationship with God? If not, how would you describe it?
6. What did Pastor Kevin say it means to pray “in Jesus’ name?” How does that help us to better understand what kind of prayer Jesus is talking about? How does this kind of prayer lead to joy?