

John Wesley, when he was a young man, was sent to be a missionary to the Indians in Georgia. And on his way there across the Atlantic, the ship that he was traveling in went into a great storm. So great of a storm, in fact, that Wesley was afraid that he was going to die, and the vast majority of those on board with him also believed the same thing. But there were a group of Christians, of Moravians, on board who were acting very differently. Instead of fear, they were calm. Instead of giving way to panic, they were praying. And instead of voicing their fears, they were singing songs and psalms. And it was this kind of fearless joy that these Moravians expressed on that day that so impacted Wesley that it changed his life forever, even before he had his great experience at Aldersgate. That kind of fearless joy which sees the world and yet knows that God is still with us in all things. Of course, we see this also in the stories of the martyrs, those who gave their lives for Jesus. The sort of things that they suffered, and yet they were calm, even making jokes, going happily to the things that they suffered, because they knew that the Lord Jesus Christ was with them always.

So how do we find this kind of fearless joy, especially in a world which is been turned upside down? That's exactly the question, actually, that the disciples in our reading for today from the Gospel were trying to find. That's the answer that they wanted, because they were facing a very difficult situation. Jesus was going away. They knew that he was going away, but they didn't quite understand how. And so they were afraid, afraid of a future that they didn't understand, afraid of something they couldn't quite comprehend. And then on top of it, Jesus is saying things that they don't understand. What does he mean by "A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me"? It doesn't make any sense. They're trying to figure out what to do, especially in a world which seems to be against them.

And how often, Christians, do we face a similar sort of fear? A joyless fear that is afraid of what the world might do to us? A joyless fear that is afraid of what might be? And think of it even in this time, the uncertainty that we face from the coronavirus, or more especially from the reaction to the coronavirus, a world which is been turned upside down and made uncertain. How are we supposed to react? How are we we supposed to find certainty in the face of this turmoil? And even more than this, what about those things that we face in our lives, those times when we're afraid that we might actually lose our lives or lose something dear to us? How easy is it to just become fearful, fearful of what could be, fearful of the world?

But Christians, listen to what Jesus says to his disciples. He says in verse 20, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice." And he spoke those words to the disciples, telling them about what he was about to suffer. How he would go and be crucified, and after he had been crucified, he would be laid in the tomb. And when he was laid in that tomb, the world did rejoice, thinking that it had conquered God, that it had stopped the things that God had promised would happen. And so, yes, they did have sorrow for a time, sorrow at losing the Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus says, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy!" The joy of the world is fleeting. It's temporary. It will go away, but the joy which Christians know is a joy which will never go away. Jesus uses the example here of a woman giving birth to a child. After she has given birth to that child, she no longer remembers the pain. She no longer remembers the suffering, but feels the joy of the child which has been born into the world. So also we, Christians, will feel that same joy, knowing that Jesus is with us always, that Jesus is the one who will see us again. Because Jesus has risen on the third day! The grave could not hold him. And no one will take that joy from us, because Jesus is alive!

Have you ever stopped to really think about what that means, Christians? About what it means for Jesus to be alive? It isn't just some little thing that we tell ourselves on Easter, a little tidbit about Jesus to remind us. This is the greatest, life-changing truth we can know! Because Jesus is alive, it doesn't

matter what the world throws at us. It doesn't matter the things that we might suffer. Jesus is alive, and we too will live with him!

Because think about all the things which we undergo. Are you afraid of what the future might hold, afraid of uncertain finances and afraid of a world which has been turned upside down? Because we are in Jesus, we don't have to be afraid. We already know how everything will end. We already know the truth. Jesus is King over all things. Are we afraid of storms, either literal or metaphorical, times when we might lose our very lives? But you know what, Christians? That doesn't matter either. Because what's the very worst that could happen? We lose our lives, and then we are with Jesus. There's nothing that death can take away from us. There's nothing that we can suffer that will take us away from him. We belong to him, and he will be with us always.

That was the great joy, that fearless joy which the martyrs expressed. And we see that in the stories that we hear of them. Take a few examples. You have Lawrence, for example, who was literally grilled alive, laid on top of a gridiron with a fire lit underneath him. And yet in the midst of that terrible death, Lawrence could turn to his tormentors and say, "Turn me over and have a bite. This side's done." And he could make that joke, he could make light of the situation, because he knew that Jesus is alive, and that no matter what he suffered right now, he would soon be with him. Or you think of the 40 Roman soldiers who were martyred by being frozen to death at Sebaste, how when they heard what their death was going to be, ran to it excitedly, even joyfully, singing songs! Because they knew, Christians, that even if they had to suffer for a moment, that suffering would give way to joy, a joy which would know no end. And you think of a man like Tyndale, who was burned at the stake because of his faith, and how just before he died, he could pray, calmly and collectedly, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." And he knew that regardless of what he suffered, he would soon be with Jesus, the living Lord who is King over all things.

That is the secret, Christians. The secret to a fearless joy is knowing that Jesus Christ lives, and because he lives, we will live with him too. And everything which we suffer in this life will be nothing in comparison with the joys that await us in heaven. And as Paul says in Romans, chapter 8, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation is going to be able to take us away from Jesus, who is our living Lord.

So Christians, rejoice! Jesus has broken the grave. Jesus lives this day, and he is very much alive, as alive as you and I are right now. And because he is alive, we will be with him forever. And we will live with him forever never to be separated from him again. He is alive, and he will bring us to himself, and our joy will know no end.

Now to him, Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Lord, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever. Amen.