

Easter 3 (2025)

F. Bland Tucker is a name all Georgia Churchman should know.

Not only was he rector for many years of Georgia's mother church, Christ Church, Savannah, he was a gifted hymn writer. A number of his hymns appear in the Episcopal hymnal.

But the story I wish to share with you this morning concerns not so much his achievements and accolades, but his response to adversity, a near brush with death.

He wrote up the story in a little booklet entitled "More than Conquerors" . . . that title, of course coming from Romans 8 where Paul says: **"in all these things [the challenges of life] we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."**

The story goes like this . . . It seems that Mr. Tucker's physician in Savannah had discovered what appeared to be a cancerous tumor on one of his lungs. He sent Mr. Tucker to Atlanta for further tests.

Those tests confirmed his suspicion. Mr. Tucker did indeed have lung cancer. Radical surgery was required and scheduled. The prognosis was not good.

He spent the night before the surgery in prayer. What followed, in his own words, was "a burst of heavenly sunshine."

Not only did he have a deep peace the following morning. But when x-rays were taken prior to the surgery, they revealed no tumor, cancerous or otherwise.

Sorrow was turned to joy, not only for himself but for members of his congregation back home. And so, he returned to Savannah

without surgery. He went on to serve Christ Church for many years.

Sorrow turned to joy is a much-repeated theme in the Bible.

We find it in the story of Hannah told in 1 Samuel 2 in the Old Testament.

Hannah had been unable to conceive a child, which in those days was a cause for great sorrow . . . as it continues to be for many couples today.

Hannah felt this sorrow keenly. In fact, so keenly that when she went with her husband to Shiloh (the place where the tabernacle was during the period of the Judges) and took the matter before the Lord, the priest, Eili thought she was drunk. He saw her mouth moving but no words coming out.

But the story does not end here, God heard Hannah's prayer. After returning home, she became pregnant. The son she bore was none other than the great prophet Samuel. Her sorrow was turned to joy.

But the turnaround Hannah experienced pales in comparison with the turnaround the disciples experienced on Easter morning.

In today's Gospel, we find Jesus, just prior to His arrest in the garden and His crucifixion the follow day, preparing the disciples for what was soon to take place.

He tells them He is going to be separated from them. "A little while, and ye shall not see me."

No doubt, those words caused a jab of pain to pass through their hearts, just as the word "cancer" must have done to F. Bland Tucker.

Jesus tells the disciples they will be sorrowful. “Ye shall weep and lament.” ///  
Why?

Well, this one is obvious. Not only was Jesus their friend, but also because death at the hand of the pagans signaled Jesus was a failed messiah. They had followed a loser.

But Jesus does not leave them with bad news. What appears – at least to the world -- as defeat was in fact gain,

He tells them. He was going to the Father which signaled, if they knew Daniel 7, not defeat, but “mission accomplished”.

And to top it off, they would see Him again. Their sorrow would be turned to joy. Just as was Hannah’s when she gave birth to Samuel many years before.

Did the disciples fully understand Jesus' words? /// No, for the most part they were left scratching their heads.

There is an application here for us. It is this: we should not be surprised or alarmed when we have questions, when God's ways seem hidden from our eyes.

The disciples had been with Jesus daily for three years, yet they did not always understand everything He said.

Again, we should not be surprised when we don't understand fully everything that is in the Bible or the meaning of everything that is going on in the world.

An example. Bad people often seem to get ahead while good people have all sorts of trouble. Why?

Like the disciples, we are left scratching our heads and asking questions

What we can learn from the disciples is that there are many things we shall only understand perfectly by and by.

That, however, should not prevent us from bringing our doubts and uncertainties and questions to the Father who loves us. After all, Jesus instructs his people to seek and ask.

Many of you are parents. If you are, you know there are times when a child asks a question to which you cannot give a full and complete answer. Instead, you give him an answer suitable to his age and ability to understand.

Maybe that is what God does with us. He reveals His truth as we are able to receive it.

My point – don't be dismayed that there are things you don't understand perfectly. Consider the disciples.

Rather put your hand into the hand of the Man of Galilee and let Him lead you through the mist.

Back to this morning's Gospel. The disciples would see their Lord again. Their sorrow would be turned to joy when they saw Him alive and touchable in the Upper Room on that first Easter evening.

This same joy would be further expanded and solidified as Jesus continued to appear to them for a period of 40 days. During this period, He would open to them the scripture, showing that all that had happened was foretold and was part of God's eternal plan. What they had understood imperfectly, they would understand better.



But the remarkable thing was that even after their Lord was received up into heaven at the Ascension, that joy did not go away.

Though no longer with them physically, they found Him to be a living and abiding presence. The Holy Spirit made Him so.

And this is where we find ourselves. The joy the disciples felt when they saw Jesus alive remains. The Holy Spirit still makes the risen Jesus present today:

- When we gathered in His name on the Lord's Day.
- When the Scriptures are read and opened.
- When we come to the Lord's Table at Holy Communion.
- When we do the many little tasks He give us in the world, we find Him present with us.

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Joy seems to be a scarce commodity in our world today . . . yes, even among Christians. All seems to be doom and gloom.

We stand in need of a burst of heavenly sunshine.

“Possibility thinking” needs to replace pessimism.

For example, instead of lamenting over the rise of the nones (people who claim to have no religious faith and which now number 28 percent of the US adult population), we need to view this group as a new mission field and look for new ways to reach out to them. We need to be reminded of the power of the Gospel. The power that transformed that ancient world is available today.

A great missionary leader and thinker of the last century, Lesslie Newbigin, was once asked if he was an optimist or a pessimist. His answer:

**“I am neither. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.”**

That – and no other -- is the source of our confidence, resolve *and joy*.

What about you? Does a dark cloud hover over *your* head?

If so, why not make a conscious decision to banish defeat and embrace possibility thinking?

Let a world bowed over in confusion and sorrow see joy, joy in you. At the dry cleaners, at the grocery store, at your work . . . where else? Everywhere you go.

Whatever the time or place or circumstance, one thing has not and does not change:

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!

Jesus sends us out to live the Good News joyfully! Let us go and do.