

## Easter 3 (2024)

Have you ever experienced a night so dark and long that you did not know how you were going to get through it?

That is how the Rector of Christ Church, Savannah, a man by the name of F. Bland Tucker, must have felt back in 1953 when doctors told him he had very large tumor growing in his left lung and that an operation was needed to remove it.

At first, there must have been denial. “Surely there is some mistake. The tests must have gotten mixed up.”

Then, there must have come fear. What is next for me and my family? Do I really believe what I preach Sunday by Sunday?

After that, there must have come pragmatic concerns over what would happen to his congregation while he was away convalescing.

Let me stop here and say that all I have said thus far is conjecture, /// as Mr. Tucker, in his little book “More Than Conquerors” does not reveal his initial reaction to his diagnosis.

What we do find in this book is the story of nothing sort of a miracle.

The people of Christ Church prayed. And surely that is where we must begin when face perplexity.

Mr. Tucker went up to the chest clinic of Emory University Hospital in Atlanta for the operation.

New X-rays were taken. These showed “a dramatic and remarkable change.” The tumor had shrunk by 80 percent and apparently was

continuing to shrink. No operation was needed.  
. . . just observation and a period of rest.

Can you imagine how he must have felt when he received that news? Night was turned to day. Heaviness into joy.

Just to round off the story, Mr. Tucker did have to stay in Atlanta for a period of observation and rest, but this time was not wasted.

Each week he would send a letter back to his congregation. These letters were filled with encouraging and challenging insights drawn from scripture.

These weekly messages were later compiled in a small book, the book I just mentioned – “More than Conquerors”. That title, of course, comes from St. Paul’s words in Romans 8. Here the great apostle asks:

**“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”**

At this point you might want to pencil in whatever is weighing on your mind this morning.

Then Paul answers his own question with a resounding, NO!

**“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”**

Just to round off Mr. Tucker’s story, after returning to Savannah, he served as Rector of Christ Church until 1967. He died in 1984 at the age of 88.

As a footnote, Mr. Tucker is a relative of one of St. Luke’s members, Joe Webb.

My reason for beginning with this story is because it parallels, at least at some points, what happened to the disciples following Jesus' death. Their sorrow was turned to joy.

When Jesus was led to Calvary and hung on the cross, their hope vanished. For you see, they had come to believe Jesus was the Messiah, the one who would restore Israel's fortunes. The cross put a giant X beside that belief.

But then came Sunday evening and a number of his followers saw Him, not as a ghost but as a tangible and touchable man.

Then and only did Jesus' words spoken after the Last Supper begin to make sense:

**“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me.”**

Along with another statement:

**“Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”**

That is what happened. But their joy was more than a momentary burst of jubilant feelings.

From that time on, they saw Him in a new light. He was more than their friend in the flesh; He was the everlasting Lord, the conqueror of sin and death, the forerunner and life-giver to all who believed.

I like the Weaver’s Poem. Some of you will have heard me quote it:

My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colours  
He weaveth steadily.

Oft’ times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper,  
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.

The disciples did not have to wait until after their death to have their perplexities delt with.

In their Bible studies following His resurrection, Jesus would reveal to them things that previously were hidden from their eyes . . . the chief being the reason He needed to suffer and die.

More light still would come 40 days after Easter when they saw Him taken up into a cloud. The Ascension said Jesus' work had been accepted and He was reigning in heaven.

Then came Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. This divine Person would open their eyes even wider to the purposes of God. Their joy would be full. Whatever happened to them, whatever challenges they faced, they were not alone. God was not just above them, but in them.

Christ's victory was their victory. No, not even death could separate them from the love of God. They were indeed *more than conquerors*.

My brothers and sisters, this can be true of you and me. Stay steady. Keep moving forward.

Going back to Mr. Tucker, something like what happened to the disciples happened to members of his congregation, I think it is safe to say.

Their sorrow was turned to joy, but it was not a momentary thing. The miracle that happened in their midst increased their faith.



With this miracle came a new assurance and joy. ///

What might we take away from this morning's Gospel? /// I think it would have to be: **How to deal with perplexities.**

Members of Jesus' hand-picked band faced them. We should not be surprised or overly alarmed when we face them.

For example, there will be things in scripture that seem cloudy and hard to understand.

A wise move when you come upon one of these passages is to lay it aside for the moment and focus on the things you do understand. Do what you know, and more understanding will be given to you. That seems to be the way it works.

Likewise, there will be perplexities in life. We might find ourselves asking such questions

as: Why is this happening to me or someone about whom I care? Where is God? Why do I hurt?

Go ahead and put those thoughts out there on the table. After all, God knows what is in your heart.

The psalmist was certainly not shy in bringing his true feelings before the Almighty. In Psalm 77:3, we find him saying: **“When my heart is vexed, I will complain.”**

Then in verse 7: **“Will the Lord absent himself for ever?”**

It gets better in verse 9: **“Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”**

But Psalm 77 does not leave us with such questions. No, the writer concludes with a positive prescription: **“I will remember the**

**works of the LORD, and call to mind thy wonders of old time.”**

Why remember? How might that help? ///

Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past gives us cause to trust Him in the present. It incites faith even when we cannot see.

The verses that immediately follow where we left off reading in today’s Gospel are likewise helpful. Here Jesus says:

**“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.**

I find J.C. Ryle’s expansion of Jesus’ words helpful. He says:

**“Let prayer in the name of Jesus be a daily habit . . . morning and evening . . . Keeping up that habit, we shall find strength**

**for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, hope in sickness, and support in death.”**

And, I might add, in the end, joy.

Life is full of perplexities.

Christianity does not give us a set of glib and pat answers.

Rather it points us to the One who took the worst life could dish out, stayed on course and was victorious, and who now says to each one of us: “Come follow me.”