

John 16:16-24  
Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 22, 2022

An activity I have enjoyed during winters of retirement (not so much this past winter, for reasons you know) is putting together jigsaw puzzles. The largest number of pieces I have tried is 1500. Relatives have completed a couple with 2,000 pieces. At the Twice Is Nice resale store where we volunteer, we have received some with 4,000 pieces. I can't imagine even having a table big enough for ones that size. When you first start, dumping out the box and turning over all those pieces, reaching a completed puzzle can seem to be a hopeless task. Eventually, however, progress is made and the pieces all fit to make a completed scene.

The disciples thought the words they had just heard from Jesus were puzzling as he spoke of several "little whiles" in the Upper Room in Jerusalem on that evening we call Maundy Thursday. A few days later they came to understand. In other words

#### JESUS FITS THE PUZZLE PIECES TOGETHER

- I. Of his work
- II. Of our lives

The disciples were confused. You can hear the bewilderment in their questions. "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'? They kept asking, 'What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying.'" He's lost me. I don't get it. What the Master had been saying was troubling. Jesus had talked about dying. He had refused the advice to stay away from the capital city. In the past there had been threats to his life and plots were underfoot. Had they heard rumors? But then had come the triumphant entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. That had been so wonderful. But now, here was Jesus talking again about departing and death. What should they be thinking?

Jesus' intended mission on this earth didn't fit prevailing opinions. Not the conclusions of his enemies, who viewed him as an imposter and blasphemer to get rid of. Not the dreams of society and the many who were attracted by his miracles and the benefits he brought. Remember how they wanted to make him a bread king after he fed the five thousand. The Jews were longing for a deliverer from the rule of Rome but he hadn't gathered an army of militants to overthrow the government. Jesus didn't even fit the desires of his own disciples during some of their crasser moments, such as when they argued about who was the greatest or when the mother of James and John brought the request for her sons to hold the

positions of honor and authority when he entered his kingdom (whatever they viewed that kingdom to be).

So they had questions, yet hesitated to ask the Savior directly. Maybe you were like that as a student: don't ask the teacher any questions because you might look stupid. Or maybe it was a case of self-reliance, as men are portrayed as refusing to ask for directions when lost. Jesus had corrected the Twelve in the past. Sometimes he even used strong words when they opposed his purposes such as telling Peter, "Get behind me, Satan," when he had objected to the Savior's plans for dying. Still, he had always dealt with them in a loving manner. He was patient with their slowness to get the point. Here with his perfect knowledge he put their puzzlement into words.

He does so with ours also. We have questions about his operation of the world and of our lives. Why do all the troubles happen that we see around us and experience ourselves? Why should one nation attack another? Why should people be gunned down when they go shopping or attend school or church? Shouldn't right prevail and evil be put down? God promises to use everything for good. How does he let so much bad stuff happen? Will this trouble really turn out well? We have spiritual struggles. We strive to serve him and do what is right. Why does he let me fail so often, that I end up doing the opposite of what I—and he—desire? Why doesn't God step in and solve my problems and give me success and happiness? He seems to be turning his back on us and telling us, "For a little while you will see me no more." We don't like it and the "little while" seems far too long.

That "little while" for the disciples was not forever, as then came Easter, which changes everything. The Lord had a plan and a purpose for his earthly years. He carried it out and did so to perfection. He was still in charge even during the "little while" when they would not see him so they could trust him for the next "little while." In the same way he is still with us, in charge of what happens and carrying out his plans whether we see and understand or not.

Jesus' disciples didn't see it all then but they would later get the point. Although he had tried to prepare them and perhaps they saw only a bit of it at the time, he knew what he was doing. He was calling them to trust him.

With our vantage point, we recognize what they missed. Jesus was going through death and then rising back to life. He would be with them for forty days to affirm and reassure them of the fact. Then his visible presence would be gone again but he would still be with them, and he was returning. It does make sense. The resurrected Jesus fits the puzzle pieces together. He changes our outlook and gives us certainty.

## II.

That was true of his work and it is true of our lives. Troubles were indeed coming, horrible experiences for Jesus to endure and for his friends to witness. They would be present (although sleeping) during his anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. They would see the mob come to arrest him, including the betrayal by one of his own disciples. Then would follow the unjust hearings and trials with their false accusations hurled against him, terrible mockery and abuse. He would be condemned and crucified. Most did not view those latter events but they surely heard about them. Finally Jesus would die and his body be placed in a tomb.

Such treatment is awful for anyone to go through. It turns my stomach to watch TV shows and movies with torture and violence when it is inflicted on people, even villains. How much worse is it when the Son of God receives abuse! Some years ago during the movie *The Passion of the Christ* I had to turn away, almost nauseous, when Jesus was being whipped and again when they nailed him to the cross. We can understand how the disciples were heartbroken at the death of the Savior. They mourned more than the loss of a friend. They recognized Jesus was true God, the promised Messiah. How could he die? Their hopes were dashed. It was a severe testing of their faith.

Those times would pass. "Time heals," goes the saying. At that moment the disciples might have questioned, will it ever? It wasn't time but the "little while" that changed everything and brought the complete opposite in feelings and reality. The Savior compared it to birth pains. The contractions can be intense for the mother-to-be. Back when we took pre-birth classes the nurse warned us future fathers that our spouse might scream, order us to leave the delivery room or insist, "I'm not going through with this." Then the baby arrives. There is delight in seeing the miracle of birth. I do recall visiting a mom in the hospital and she hadn't felt the change in attitude just quite yet, for she said, "I'm never going through that again," but a couple years later I baptized another baby for the same couple. So here it happened as Jesus foretold. "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." The disciples spent a miserable start of the weekend but their misery, while intense, was short. The "little while" was a mere three days, and really only pieces of the first and the last of them. "After a little while you will see me," he had said. He rose, as we have been celebrating in this Easter season. He conquered death. He showed himself alive to his enemies in hell and to many followers on earth, multiple times.

Jesus fits the puzzle pieces together of our relationship with God. Our living Savior won forgiveness for all our sins. He atoned for our times of doubt and weak faith. He removed the penalty for our mistreatment of others. He paid for our

disobedience toward God and his ways. Instead we now are at peace with God. We do not have to fear his condemning judgment. Our loving Lord won the victory and gives us the status of holy.

He fits together the puzzle pieces of our future. We know that each day is going to be good so we can face it with optimism. He will guide and bless us. He will bring a good result from all that happens to us, even from the troubles that are part of life in a sinful world. When we can't figure out the whys behind events, we still know he has a purpose for whatever he allows to cross our path. When we can't see what the future holds, we are still confident. We trust his leadership and follow him in faith. We are content with his plans for our lives. We also have the privilege of prayer, confident of a good answer, as he assured at the end of the text.

Our eternal future is also dramatically altered by what happened on Easter. Yes, death will one day take us, but it has become the doorway to a grand and glorious existence in the perfection of heaven. Truly we "will see him again." In fact, our view will be unending. We will have no questions—no longer ask him anything. We often talk about some of the mysteries of life and things the Bible hasn't revealed that we want to ask about when we get to heaven. There may not be a long line before his throne and our list may not be lengthy. As we heard from the Apostle Paul last Sunday, "Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." How can we view our future with anything but joy?

Jesus also fits the puzzle pieces together of our purpose now. We are not wandering aimlessly through a confusing maze. We have a definite role and purpose for being here. We have no reason to be self-centered. We live for Jesus and seek to glorify him. We sing his praises. We strive to obey his commandments in thanks for his goodness. We credit him for the blessings that surround us.

We also want to share that good news. We know we are not the only recipients of his victory. He won it for all people. Tell them. Let the joy of the living Jesus show in your approach to each day and color all your relationships.

Truly Jesus changes everything. It all fits together in one grand scene, each day and forever. Live in that certainty always!