

2.26.23 Sermon

It Will Be OK | John 16:17-24

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

death, jesus, grief, disciples, die, feeling, joy, guttural, poem, angelou, happen, situation, deb, passed, god, sharing, lives, understand, suffering, words

SPEAKERS

Rev. Sophia A. Foutres

Rev. Sophia A. Foutres

Welcome everyone and good morning, it's so great to be here!

So, just a short introduction... actually James, it's cool that you brought up Maya Angelou because when I was in high school, I was terribly afraid of public speaking, so I joined the speech team and did poetry readings. And the poems that I read were "Phenomenal Woman", "Still I Rise" and another one from Sylvia Plath. And those poems and that competition helped me to speak. Now, it didn't cure the shakes or feeling like I want to throw up before I talk, but it did give me a real respect, especially for the words of my Angelou. So, thank you.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Sophia Foutres, and I wrote a little something so you could get to know me a little better before we dig in. It's like a rap and a poem all together. I'd call it a pap, but that would be weird. So maybe we could call it a roem.

I'm here.
I'm queer.
I'm Near.

Thanks be to god.

No thanks to Sod - am and Gomorrah
They misinterpreted and made me a villain.
But I aint killin'
I just keep fillin
Even if my clothes be pillin
I still aint billin'

I keep dealin grace
Taking up my space
Coz I know my place
even if you spit in my face
I still think you're an ace.

They tried to impeach
But Ima about to preach
This religion - so bleached.
Love and justice better breach.

The love of God is free
Everybody say, "Wee."

Thank you, thank you, everyone.

So that's just that's who I am. Right? I maybe make you feel warm and loving and everything. But I love to make people laugh. Because I work in hospice and I'm around death all day, and laughter is good.

Today I want to remind you that in a little while, everything will be okay. Is anybody right now in a situation where that just feels like total BS. Where that just feels like Yeah, yeah, you're just giving me some toxic positivity and trying to push off my suffering? Well, I promise you, I'm not doing that. But I am quoting the words of Jesus. We'll get there later.

So, for the last quarter of a decade, we've been going through John, which deserves every single ounce, the book of John is my favorite. And we've been going through it and we're in John 16. In the last few weeks, we've heard from so many incredible voices.

Sandra just broke apart and shared with us being synced and connected with God, that imagery of the Apple Watch with the phone. Kevin shared this image of being suspended in a triangle of love and in the universal dimensions of being held by God by some infant mystery of grace. And today, continuing in John, Jesus is in the middle of a very important discussion with His disciples. He's days away from being murdered by the local mob. And he's trying to prepare his friends for what is about to happen.

This is not the first time he's trying to say to His disciples, what's going to happen? Ever since Jesus really landed on the scene, he's been trying to let everybody know and say, "Hey, listen,

something bad is going to happen to me. I just want you to be ready. Right? I'm going to die. They're going to kill me, but it's going to be okay." And so, this isn't the first time in our texts that she's saying this.

He's been saying it over and over and over again. But they can't get it. Have you ever felt that way? When you're going through something and somebody's like, "it's just going to be okay." You're like, I don't think it is. And the reality is, sometimes it's not okay. On this side. And we live in the realm of not okayness with certain situations, until we transform it and enter into a different realm.

Let's read our text today together. If you want to follow along, you can in your Bible or your apps, John 16:16-20, for the disciples, grief will turn to joy. Jesus went on to say, in a little while, you will see me no more. And then after a while, you will see me at this some of the disciples began to murmur among each other saying, "What does he mean saying in a little while you will see me no more. And then after a little while, you will see me again, because I'm going to the Father."

They kept asking, "What does he mean by a little while? We don't understand what he's saying." And Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this. So, he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said in a little while you will see me no more? And then after a while, you'll see me again. Very, truly, I'll tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices, you will grieve but your grief will turn to joy." And that term there is *ginomai*, it's a Greek word, and it literally means that there will be a transition from one realm of understanding to the next, a change of condition, a movement of growth.

Then he goes on to say, a woman giving birth to a child has pain, because her time has come, but when her baby's born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. This is this is a key statement here, it might seem kind of like a normal example. But in Jesus's day, obviously, Jesus was Jewish, so he knew all of the Jewish traditions and teachings. So, he brings this out, it's like he's pulling out all the stops to get these guys to understand what's about to happen.

In Jewish tradition and culture, there are believed to be two ages: the present age and the age that is to come. In between those two ages, something terrible is supposed to happen on the day of the Lord, which will bring about the travailing birth of the Messiah. Jesus is telling his disciples that they are about to be in that time, and he is trying to use their language and culture to help them understand. He is saying that they are about to have the baby, and the labor pains are happening, and it's going to hurt like hell. Jesus tries to prepare and talk to them so they have something to understand.

He goes on to say that it is now their time to grieve, and this grief is not just being sad about something small. It is deep guttural anguish, sorrow, and suffering. But Jesus promises that they will see him again, and their joy will not be taken away. They will no longer need to ask him anything, as his Father will give them whatever they ask in his name. They need to ask and they will receive, aggressively and assertively taking hold of what is already theirs. Then their joy will be complete, and they will be filled to capacity.

The disciples were repeatedly told by Jesus what was coming, but they just didn't get it. It's no surprise that humans deny death's coming, fight it, and seek to avoid demise. Death is one of those things that happens to every single person. Everyone dies, but it's that one thing in life that we resist.

Hospice worker and therapist Kathleen Dowling Singh says, "death is the experience of 'no exit,' a recognition of the fact that the situation is inescapable, that one is utterly at the mercy of the power of the Ground of Being...it is absurd and monstrous."

When the disciples finally got the Messiah they were waiting for, it must have been difficult for them to hear that he was going to die. They had finally found the person who loved them, understood them, healed them, and performed miracles for them. He fed all the people, spoke in riddles and rhymes, and was finally here. But he just kept telling them that he was going to die.

Singh says she's with dying people every day in hospice, and even though they know they're dying, when they die, it's still shocking. The family is also shocked, and there is that guttural feeling of this wasn't supposed to happen. Death isn't just physical. It's also job loss, cancer, crime, racism, bigotry, hatred, and all of the things that go on in life that we think shouldn't happen. So, what do we do? How do we find some sort of comfort when the reality is that these things are happening? We all will die, and Christ did die. In our lives, we will experience a million little deaths every day and the suffering and pain that come with them.

Richard Rohr says, "Christianity, as well as Buddhism and other religions and natural systems, suggests that the pattern of transformation, the pattern that connects the life that reality offers us is not death avoided, but death transformed." In other words, the only trustworthy pattern of spiritual transformation is death, and resurrection. And in this scripture, in this passage, we're getting the prototype of what everything else will then fall through.

Jesus is saying, I'm going to die, death is going to happen. But I'm going to come back in a little while. And in that time, everything will be okay. And your joy will be made full. You'll be able to have uninhabited connection with God at all times. And you won't ever be alone. Because you'll have the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, that counselor that lives within your spirit.

You won't ever face death the same way you did before this event, but every little death that happens will be transformed and new life will come

I had a dream once, two dreams from two of my grandmothers. The first dream was from my Yiayia Madeline, we called her Yiayia because I'm Greek. In the dream, she came to me wearing all white and said "Christ is risen" with her hands out, while glowing light shone everywhere. She looked fantastic and happy. This dream has brought me comfort, as it reminds me that when she died, she wasn't saying "I'm dead", but rather that there is life, and that it's alive.

There's more to life than just this earthly existence, and it didn't just end with death. There is grief on this side of earth, whether it's related to injustice, physical death, or any other difficult circumstance. We cry, mourn, and feel pain, just like Jesus did with Lazarus. However, we can also have hope that it's not the end of all things, but rather the end of one thing as we knew it.

The second dream was about Deb's grandmother, who was in the process of dying at the time. In the dream, my grandmother came to me, looking plump again, and wearing her favorite apron that she used to cook in, with bacon. She arrived in her kitchen, where we used to bake baklava and other goodies, and said "You have to take me to grandma's house. I have to tell her that everything is going to be okay, and it's better than she could ever imagine here."

I shared this dream with Deb, who told me that the day before, she felt the need to tell her grandmother that everything was going to be okay. Deb was moved by my dream, as it showed her that everything is better than we could ever imagine, even after someone has passed away. While the world may be different without our loved ones, there is hope for transformation and new life, even in the midst of grief and pain.

I wonder in your life where things are dying or dead, or if you need Jesus to come into those areas and bring transformation and new life. For every dying space, there is an opportunity for transformation into life. For every disappointment, there is an opportunity to encounter love, hope, and peace. For every broken relationship, there is an opportunity for it to be transformed by love. It may not get better in this life, but we always have the choice of what we believe about what's happening, and we always have the choice to take the journey with Jesus from death to resurrection. This cycle is evident in nature, and we can watch it in action.

20:05

So, I wrote another little poem wrap to kind of summarize what I sensed from this passage, but first, I just want to pause. Does anybody have a question? Or is there anybody thinking something? And they're like, I don't know, I don't I just feel like I'm supposed to ask if you have

a question. Or if you have a thought. Anything coming up for anybody just shout it out. Go ahead.

Two things came to mind; after my mom passed away, I was devastated. I knew I needed help, so I sought out a counselor. Unfortunately, the counselor wasn't great. However, there was one thing he said that stuck with me. He asked, "If your mom could say anything to you right now, what do you think she'd say?" Without hesitation, my response was, "I'm alright." It was the perfect thing to say. I could almost hear my mom's voice saying, "I'm alright." And I knew that I would be alright too.

Another thing that happened was after one of my older sisters passed away. She had gone on a trip to Florida that I don't remember her going on. Sometime after she passed, I was going through a junk drawer and found a postcard that she had sent me. The postcard simply read, "This place is fantastic. I'm having a wonderful time." It felt like I had just received a postcard from heaven. It was such a comfort to know that everything was alright.

Thank you for sharing that, thank you. So simple yet so profound. Thank you, anyone else?

Two things really come to mind when I hear you speak. I just keep thinking of the cycle of life: we live, we die, and then we live again. Right? That's where I am on my journey.

But when my sister Sandy passed away, I remember having a rough night after her service. When I went to sleep, I heard God say these words: "Joy comes in the morning." The very next day, I woke up feeling joyful because I knew Sandy had been reconnected with her son who had passed on. So, thank you.

I just have two things to say. Firstly, I appreciate the understanding that before we can say "okay", there's the crud or whatever we can call it here. Secondly, I really heard you talk about the idea of opportunity and how there are old stories that we hear in our heads when we face terrible situations. This week, I have been thinking a lot about these old stories in my head that precede anything that happens, and they are generally pretty bad because of the terrible situation we are in. However, as you were talking, I started to think about all the amazing opportunities that I have to learn and grow from this situation.

I was surprised that I started to think this way, about how something really bad could also be an opportunity. Despite the sorrow and all the other negative emotions that come with the situation, I smiled at myself and said, "I am choosing to find the opportunities for growth." You also mentioned that we have a choice about how we believe in a situation, and today, in this place, I am choosing to believe in the opportunities for growth. I really appreciate your words and how they made me think about the positive aspects of this situation.

Thank you anyone else...

A good friend of mine found a wooden plaque with a saying on it. The saying was "It'll BOK" It's just a fun way of saying what you've been saying: It Will Be Okay. So, it's something that pops into my head when I'm having those moments that take me off my edge. It makes me think of things in a different sense and helps me calm down.

Thank you, we have time to do one more... Joni.

This is the anniversary week of Bob's death coming up this week. It's bringing up a lot for me. About a week after he died, I was in that state between being awake and asleep. I wasn't dreaming, but I wasn't fully awake either. As clear as if he was in the room with me, I heard Bob say, "Joan...it's not what we thought... it's so much better."

To this day, I don't know exactly what he meant. It could mean many different things. But he was excited and it brought me comfort at that moment. It was like he was saying that all the things we thought weren't true, but it was so much better than we imagined.

I remember sharing this experience with Tracy and Tony. At the time, I wasn't even getting out of bed yet, but this experience gave me hope. It was pretty amazing and profound. I've held onto it for all these years.

Yeah, thank you Joni. Very powerful thank you for sharing!

I want to take a moment and acknowledge that every one of us may be going through a tough situation. Maybe you're doing fine, but there might be a situation in your life or in the world that requires comforting words from Jesus. He assures us that he will see us through and that everything will be okay. There will be a transformation of this pain.

So, take a minute to ask yourself, as Daryl did, what would God say to you in this situation? What would Jesus say to you right now, or whatever your belief may be, what would the divine love say to you right now? Take a moment to listen. I'll give us 30 seconds. If you didn't hear anything, that's okay. My words to you are that in a little while, everything will be okay.

Jesus tried to prepare us
But we put up a fuss
And thought it was sus

He said BRB

I am the Key
But they couldn't see

Disciples so confused
About to lose to their holy muse

Let's talk about grief
I'll try to be brief
Death is a thief
And religion is the sheaf.

Again, and again, I'll be right back.
But they almost had a heart attack.

Death lost its sting
All thanks to the KING
Holy Spirit's gonna Ping
Ask the father Anything

It won't be like this forever
Even if you're not too clever

Everything will be okay
Yes, even if you're gay.

The greatest schism.
It's Racism.

Even if cancer landed you a port
Just know you got support

No need to be a good sport
Jesus is the fort.

Soon your joy will be full
Even if you were a bull.

Yes, there will be death,
I hope you can catch your breath coz

Dying isn't the end,
I know it's hard to comprehend.

Separation is an illusion.
One day there will be a holy union

This is the conclusion.
No more exclusion.

Everybody's welcome to the table of communion
Let's call it a resurrection- re-union.