

### **Saturday, April 19: It's Quiet Uptown (Holy Saturday)**

*Written by Brian Johnson, Pastor, Haymarket Church, Haymarket, VA*

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2w82KRjGk874HFjBkU4SPv?si=68e925fe0ca848d7>

<https://open.spotify.com/track/40LYL1Z6xgCn5cBybo5K0D?si=5afbbcb71f964aa2>

We were so excited to meet our niece that night.

She was our first niece (or nephew) and she'd just been born. After our oldest son finished his day at school (he was in first grade at the time), we loaded the family in the minivan, packed dinner to eat on the road (lunch meat sandwiches, chips, apples, etc.) and started driving. It would take about two hours to get to the hospital where our beautiful little niece was waiting for us.

But the drive didn't go as we had planned. Our son has food allergies – at the time, he was allergic to dairy, egg, and peanuts (he's outgrown the dairy and egg allergies since then, but still has a life-threatening peanut allergy). His dairy allergy had been becoming less severe, and his allergist had recommended that we introduce him to dairy in small amounts in food items that had been baked – he couldn't have a glass of milk or a slice of cheese, but he could eat Cheez-its and breads with small amounts of dairy baked into them – and, he was supposed to eat some of those things every day, in order to slowly get his body used to dairy and build up his resistance to it.

Anyway, to go with his sandwich we packed him some puffy cheese curls – the kind covered in artificial powdered cheese. They had a tiny amount of dairy in them, and he had just started eating them a few weeks earlier, and he loved them. We drove down, listening to music, singing along, excited to meet our new family member.

About an hour later, we looked into the back seat, and we realized something was wrong. Our son was congested, his face was red and puffy, he was still breathing OK, but he definitely was not the perfectly healthy, smiling kid who we had picked up from school. It seems that he had had a reaction to the cheese puffs. He was only in first grade, after all, and as the artificial cheese coating got on his skin, he rubbed it on his face, and then his face itched, and he rubbed his itchy face with his cheese-powder covered hands, and, before we knew it, he was having an allergic reaction.

It was scary. We pulled over. We gave him the meds he was supposed to take for a reaction like this. And then, when it was under control, we kept driving. We got to the hospital and waited for an hour before going in to meet our niece – waiting to make sure the reaction was over. Any parent who has ever sat with their child in the midst of a medical crisis has a sense of what we were feeling. Once he was better, we went and saw our niece – she was beautiful, and it was great to meet her and celebrate her with her parents – and then we drove home. We were full of joy over the addition of a new member to our family, but we were also overwhelmed, scared, worn thin in the wake of this unexpected moment of panic. When you have a child with life-threatening food allergies, any day can become an

existential crisis. One time forgetting to check the ingredient label, one time when someone feeds your kid without your permission, one moment when someone doesn't wash their hands after eating peanuts or forgets that their famous cookies have a secret ingredient – one mistake, and you're in the ER, or worse. He was OK – and we were OK – but we were shaken. We had gotten in the car ready to celebrate a new life – but by the time we got to our destination we were worrying about the life of our beloved son. It was a reminder that life is fragile, that it is out of our control – it was a reminder of risks we'd rather not contemplate most days.

On the drive home, as we were decompressing, processing the day, listening to music, "It's Quiet Uptown" came on Spotify. If you're not familiar with the song, it's from the Broadway musical "Hamilton." (We were listening to the version sung by Kelly Clarkson on the Hamilton Mixtape, but it and the Broadway original are both worth a listen.) It's a song about the aftermath of Alexander Hamilton's son, Philip, being killed in a duel. It's about the grief of losing a child and trying to move forward in the face of unimaginable darkness. It's also about Hamilton and his wife, Eliza, reconciling after Hamilton's (very public) affair. The song is about people who are trying to put one foot in front of the other when the weight of the future seems impossible to bear. It's about being in the deepest darkness and finding a glimpse of the light. It's about experiencing grace, forgiveness, and hope that goes beyond words. The song opens with these words:

*There are moments that the words don't reach  
There is suffering too terrible to name  
You hold your child as tight as you can  
And push away the unimaginable*

*The moments when you're in so deep  
It feels easier to just swim down  
The Hamiltons move uptown  
And learn to live with the unimaginable*

As I listened to those words, I found myself reaching for my wife's hand. I squeezed it as I drove, and we looked at each other, and we sighed deeply. Unlike Hamilton, our son had not died. Our situation was much better than the one depicted in the song. But we knew that his food allergies really were (are) life-threatening. We had felt – maybe for just a moment – that he was in danger. We had watched this child who we love more than words can express gasp for air and experience fear over his own health. We had felt out-of-control and frightened. We had faced – even if only momentarily – the unimaginable possibility of losing him. We had been forced to face the fragility of our lives together.

The story we Christians tell is a story about a God who enters into the darkness of suffering and death. God knows what it is like to feel hopeless, because God, in Jesus Christ, has felt it. God knows how fragile life is, because God, in Jesus Christ, has experienced the end of life, the candle being

snuffed out. God knows what it means to grieve for a loved one, to stand on the precipice, to walk into the darkness when all seems to be lost. God shows up – is present in – moments of suffering, the depths of our fears, experiences of death and loss.

Towards the end of “It’s Quiet Uptown,” as Alexander Hamilton and Eliza begin to come to grips with their son’s death and reconcile their relationship, we hear these words:

*There are moments that the words don't reach*

*There is a grace too powerful to name*

*We push away what we can never understand*

*We push away the unimaginable*

*They are standing in the garden*

*Alexander by Eliza's side*

*She takes his hand - it's quiet uptown.*

*Forgiveness, can you imagine?*

*Forgiveness, can you imagine?*

From the deepest darkness, hope emerges. In the midst of death, new life is born. That is the story we tell each year as we move towards Holy Week and, through Holy Week, to Easter. Death is real. Suffering is real. The world can be dark, and can sometimes feel hopeless. But that is not where the story ends. There is a grace too powerful to name. God is present to us in and through the worst things we face. After death comes resurrection.

Sitting in the car driving home, we had to trust that there was more to life than simply its fragility. There is more to life than the risk of death. Our son had faced a medical crisis that night; beautiful new life had entered into the world in the person of our niece. Life is terrifying, but it is also beautiful. Death stalks us, but so does resurrection. This is the mystery each of us must face. This is the mystery of a God who is revealed in cross and empty tomb.

In a world that can be overwhelming, in the face of life’s fragility, that is the Good News we need. God is with us. God does not give up on us. God can bring hope from even the most hopeless situations. Can you imagine?