

The Fourth Sunday of Easter | St. John 16:16-23
May 7, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O blessed Lord, who promised Your disciples that through Your Easter victory their sorrow should be turned to joy, and their joy no man should take from them: Grant us, we pray You, so to know You in the power of Your resurrection, that we may be partakers of that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory; for Your holy name's sake. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, 88)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me." / So some of His disciples said to one another, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" So they were saying, "What does He mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." / Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him, so He said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me'? Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of Me." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who is the "Light of my soul, my Joy, my Crown" (ELH 54, v. 1), dear fellow redeemed:

Those three days were etched into their memories as into stone. They were days that they would never forget. Three horrible days. The disciples had not felt so alone, so afraid as they did then. We would have felt the same way. Imagine one day dropping everything in order to follow a religious teacher wherever he decided to go. You follow him for three years, and then his enemies manage to kill him. What now? What should you do? Would the same people who killed him come after you? Was it the wrong decision to follow him in the first place?

The disciples were in this same position, except the Man they had been following was like no other. It was not just what He said, it was also what He could do. He performed wonders that no other person in history had done. They believed He was God in the flesh. When many of His followers were leaving Him, Peter spoke for the twelve disciples in saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the

Holy One of God” (Jn. 6:68-69). At another point he said, “See, we have left everything and followed you” (Mt. 19:27). They left everything for Him, and now they were left alone.

There were others like them, including women who had followed Jesus all the way from Galilee. They wept for Him as He was forced forward to Calvary. They saw Him suffering on the cross and heard His cries of anguish. Then it was over. He breathed no more. They watched as His dead body was lowered from the cross and laid in a tomb. They returned home in great sorrow and made plans to return after the Sabbath to give Him a more proper burial.

I

It is not possible for us to fully grasp how these followers of Jesus felt. He was the embodiment of all those Old Testament promises about the One who was coming to redeem Israel. He was the bright light in a dark world. He was the fulfillment of their greatest hopes and dreams. And then He was gone. What could anyone say or do to bring those hopes back to life? Without Jesus, there was nothing.

You and I cannot imagine what those three days were like for the disciples. But we have lived through our own versions of a “three-day” trial. Maybe it was the continuous verbal or physical attacks of others. Maybe it was the diagnosis of a serious disease with no known cure. Maybe it was the break-down of a marriage and the painful process of divorce. Maybe it was the sudden loss of your job. Maybe it was the pain of anxiety or depression. Maybe it was the death of someone you loved dearly.

At those times, hope was elusive and comfort fleeting. You did not know if the Lord was with you. You wondered if He might be against you. Wherever He was, it seemed to you that He were dead. Perhaps you can relate to how the disciples felt after all. But we must not overlook how Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for their three-day anguish, just as He wants to prepare you for your trials.

The night before His death, Jesus told His disciples, *“A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me” (v. 16)*. Naturally they wondered what Jesus was talking about. He explained, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (v. 20)*. They would weep and lament because He would be taken from them and crucified. To add insult to injury, the world would rejoice at their troubles.

But Jesus promised them an end to their sorrow. He used the illustration of a woman in childbirth. She feels great anguish and pain. She may wonder if she will even survive the ordeal. But she pushes on because she trusts that some good will come of this trouble. And then that good is resting in her arms. Her trouble troubles her no more; she rejoices at the birth of her child. Jesus explained the connection to the Christian life, *“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (v. 22)*.

II

It is during the nighttime that our problems can seem so difficult to overcome. We lie awake wondering how a wrong situation can be set right, how a bad situation can be kept from getting worse. Our minds fill with regret for how we did someone harm, and how we wish we could

just start over again. It is during the night that our fears are most vivid. We lie awake wanting to stay alert and yet wanting to sleep. Those sleepless nights seem so long, so unending. But eventually, morning does come.

Morning broke in Jerusalem the third day after Jesus' death. The eleven disciples no doubt slept fitfully the previous night. The women did not sleep well either. They were anxious to go to the tomb and do one thing more for the Teacher they loved. They expected to face in the daytime what kept them up at night; they prepared to look upon death. But they found something very different. An angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone revealing an empty tomb. *"He has risen,"* he said; *"He is not here. See the place where they laid him"* (Mk. 16:6). They could hardly believe it! With a mixture of fear and joy, they ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus Himself met them and greeted them (Mt. 28:8-9). He was alive! The night before they did not know that there was any hope, but now in the morning there was joy.

The resurrection of Jesus is our hope also. His resurrection means that there will be an end to our sorrows. His resurrection is the light that leads us through our dark troubles. His resurrection gives birth to our joy.

Jesus' resurrection means you do not worship a dead Lord, but a Lord who lives, never to die again. He knows well your troubles and your pain. He does not leave you to suffer alone. His promise to His disciples is also for you, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live"* (Jn. 14:18-19).

Jesus lives, so you live. Jesus sees you, and you see Him, but not with your eyes. You behold Him in His Word and Sacraments by faith. Those are the places He promises to be found by you to strengthen you in every trial. Those are the places He delivers joy when you did not know joy was possible any longer.

III

Before Jesus' disciples could know and appreciate this joy, they had to go through "a little while" of trouble. There had to be terrible suffering, a wretched death, and those three dark days before there was a victorious resurrection.

Jesus had explained to them many times what He had to do, but they trusted what they saw instead of what they heard. The angel told the terrified women at the empty tomb, *"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise"* (Lk. 24:6-7). Later that day, Jesus chided the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"* (Lk. 24:25-26).

You and I must also learn to rely on the Lord's Word—a lesson that is often taught through trials. These things teach you to recognize your limits. You cannot fix every problem. You cannot heal every hurt. You cannot make the sleepless nights stop. But you can seek Jesus where He promises to be found. You can go to His Word and thereby enter into His gracious

presence. Through His Word, He comes to you with forgiveness for your self-reliance, your weak faith, and your despair. He brings you the comfort of His care and His goodness. He brings you the help and strength you need to endure the “little while” of your afflictions. And He shares with you the hope of a brighter day. The prophet Malachi recorded the Lord’s promise that *“the sun of righteousness—Jesus, your Savior—shall rise with healing in its wings”* (Mal. 4:2).

Jesus shines the bright rays of His grace into your heart and warms you with the confidence that though you may have sorrow now, He will soon take you to be with Him. King David wrote that *“Weeping may tarry for the night, but **Joy Comes with the Morning**”* (Ps. 30:5). Joy is yours even now because of the morning of Jesus’ resurrection. The light of His victory dispels the night of sin and death.

And you will also be delivered from the sin and trouble that cling desperately to you in this world. You will shake all this off when Jesus comes calling on the Last Day. No more will you have anguish or pain or affliction. No more will you have to endure and struggle and wait. When Jesus comes in glory, and you see Him with your own eyes, then *“[your] heart will rejoice, and no one will take [your] joy from [you]”* (v. 22).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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