

Sermon Easter 4 2021

April 25, 2021

John 16:16-22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me. It's not hard to understand why the disciples were gripped with confusion at hearing the Lord speak those words. John tells us that this evening, the evening we call Maundy Thursday, was filled with all manner of conversation between Jesus and His disciples. How this compared with other evenings in the presence of the Teacher, we don't know. But this night certainly had its unique aspects. First of all, it was the celebration of the Passover. It would have been different, obviously, sort of like the night before Easter for us, or Christmas Eve, maybe. It's a holy day in the proper sense. It's a big celebration, and they're all geared for that occasion. So that makes it unusual. Then Jesus tells them that He's giving them this command to love, and as He does this, He washes their feet. That's unusual too. Then, He's going on all of these different talking points. Talking, like they point out, about going to the Father, about being the Way, the Truth, and the Life, talking about going away and the Comforter coming to them because He's going. It would have been strange. And that doesn't even take into account whether or not they had already observed the Passover meal and Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper. But nonetheless, you get my point. This would have been unusual already. And then to have Jesus say that, "**A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.**" Again, you can appreciate the confusion.

So, what was He trying to tell them? I think you can gather it if you consider the context. The next day, that night really, He would be taken from them. He would be taken from their sight. Then He would be crucified and buried. No one would be seeing Him while He was in the tomb. And they would be saddened by this. As He goes on from that statement, He explains it. **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.** He will be taken in this way, they will be saddened. The world will be glad. They'll be glad because this troublemaker, this "imposter" as the Pharisees call Him, He'll be gone. But the disciples will mourn.

However, their sorrow will be turned to joy. He will be raised, and they will rejoice. They will then see Him again. They will be locked in the room for fear, but He will stand in their midst, He will speak peace to them, He will bless them, and they will rejoice.

Of course, we know that story. We know the joy and the effect this had on those disciples. If you know the tradition of the Church, it says that all of those disciples turned from their sorrow into a life of dedication to the Lord and His Word, to a life serving the Church and the proclamation of that resurrection to the world. In fact, they were so converted that nearly all of them even died for the cause. We know that this happened. But that was then. What's that have to do with us?

Well, as Jesus has ascended to the Father, where is He? To be clear, where is His body that we could see it with our human, earthly eyes? It's in heaven, right? And because of that, we see Him no longer. And there's sorrow, there's sadness, there's suffering and trial. We all know it. We've known it in particularly challenging ways in the last year. But it's the reality, isn't it?

But even so, how much are we deluded about the sorrow now? How much do we try to pretend like that sorrow isn't that bad? How much do we delude ourselves about it? Think about how we have tried to create a world that imagines this sorrow doesn't exist, or that we can control it.

I was listening to a podcast and the speaker was talking about how much this has had an effect on children. He was saying how children have been raised in environments that are so mitigating of risk that many are having a severely challenged time in entering into adulthood. There isn't a confidence to do bold and challenging things. And it makes sense, after all, they've been padded and protected at every corner their entire life. And to be clear, we still have our kids wear helmets when they ride their bikes, we still put seatbelts on them in the car. I'm not saying we need to put our kids at undue risk, but the point is to demonstrate how we think that we can create a world that is free from sorrow by mitigating risk, but we can't. In that case, it ends up exchanging one sorrow for another, and that's so often what happens.

And yet look at how we deal with sorrow. We do things like create the mentality you can see in what's called the Word Faith Movement. I've mentioned that before, but the Word Faith movement is a movement within America Christianity which says if you believe God enough and speak aloud your trust that He will provide something, then He'll do it. To connect this to sorrow, then it can be assumed that if you just claim the right things and trust God enough, then there won't be sorrows anymore.

Or look at what else we do. We blame the sorrows on God. Adam and Eve did this at the fall—Adam in particular: “it was the woman YOU gave me.” As we suffer, we look at God and say, “This is all your fault!” But whose fault is this sorrow and suffering? It's ours. It's here because of our sin. But that's a way that we deal with this sorrow, a way that's unhelpful.

Or, we put our head in the sand and pretend it's not there. We pretend that, sure bad stuff happens, but it's not as though there is something that has corrupted the core of existence for the world, so it's not that bad. In view of that, then, we create the mentality that we can make it go away. If we just exercise enough, we can keep away the diseases and early deaths connected to things like cardiac issues—except of course for those who are in perfect shape and still end up with them, or even die. Or we can avoid the sorrows of death if we eat the right foods and avoid the wrong ones—again except for those who eat all the right things, but still get cancer. Again, I'm not saying we shouldn't exercise or eat a healthy diet. But, the reality is that while we can't see our Lord face to face, there will be these sorrows.

But what does He say? **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.** Those of you who have kids and have been through labor, or have been through your wives going through labor, I'm sure, can relate to this. There is all of this struggle and sorrow. I remember with one of our kids, my wife getting the point where it was so painful that she was saying she wasn't sure she could do it. But she did, and when she did there was the child, and there was the joy of that birth. This is the joy of the return of Jesus.

As I say that, though, that joy was the disciples at the resurrection because they saw Jesus. We can't see Jesus face to face in the same way, but where do we see Him? He's here, in the waters of baptism. He's here in the preaching of His Word. We meet Him as He comes to us in His body and blood in a unique way in His Holy Supper. You want joy now? It's there. It's here. It's in that forgiveness of the cross, in the victory of the resurrection of Jesus brought to your hearing, brought to your tasting, brought to you. There, Christians is your joy. And think about what joy this is.

Think about that for a second. There is this sorrowful world, and why, again, is it sorrowful? Because of sin. But what did Jesus do? He dealt with sin. As much as we don't want to deal with the depth of the sorrow of this world, when we do, there is the death of our sin. When we do, we deal with just what we really, really deserve. And in Christ, we see that what we deserve also has been dealt with, been buried, been crushed under His feet. And think about what that means for this sorrow. It means it's never as sad again for us.

Now, it's not to say that we don't still know that sorrow, we don't still experience it. Like I said a couple of weeks ago, it's not like Christians never wrestle with depression.

Likewise, it's like I've said before, I don't like the kids songs that give us the idea that Christianity is all about being happy. This joy isn't happiness. It's more than that.

In fact, listen to what one of the commentators I read about this this week said about it. He said that when John speaks of this joy, *"What John has in view is that the ancient time has run its course and the time of joy is present with Jesus. The statement that joy is fulfilled gives us the specific Johannine sense. Fulfilled does not mean that joy has reached a climax but that its object has appeared. Throughout John's Gospel fulfilment and joy are related to the person of Jesus."* To put that another way, he's saying that when John speaks of joy, he's saying that joy has come, it's been fulfilled. That doesn't mean that it's topped out and done. No, it means that joy is in Jesus. Joy is the knowledge that the sorrows of this world have been buried in the tomb of the Man of Sorrow. It means that joy is in this One who overcame all sorrow on the first Easter, overcame your sorrow on that first Easter. How? Because He forgave your sin which brings death and suffering to you. Because in that forgiveness death no longer has a claim on you. Because the devil can't hold you captive to it anymore. These things that bring you sorrow do so you because you feel like you can't escape from them, but He is your escape from them.

If I could bring one more connection to this really quickly, I was reading from the Church Father, St. Augustine this week. Augustine lived when there had been widespread persecution of the Church. And he tells about a friend of his who had been wealthy, but sold all that He had to in view of knowing that in Christ there was a wealth that would never perish. In view of that, when persecution came, there was not this attachment. If he lost everything he, the consequence was not dire. Did he want to? Did he want to suffer the pain and the challenge that went with the persecution? Probably in many ways no. But He did suffer it, He gave up all because He knew that in Jesus his joy was complete.

Christians, that is true for you. As you wait to see Jesus face to face, His place in heaven doesn't detract from the joy that is in Him, that joy that He is for us. And that joy is the joy that has overcome all things, all sin, all death, the devil himself. That joy is the joy that has overcome every sorrow. And hear once more what He says, **"but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."** He has given that joy to you. It's yours. No one can snatch from you. No one. Amen.