

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Easter, April 26, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 210, 466:4, 198, 200, 204.

Lessons: Job 19:25-27, 1 Corinthians 15:12-23, Luke 24:1-8.

Sermon Text: John 16:16-22

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ Jesus, our Risen Savior, Fellow Redeemed:

Before Jesus gave up His life for us on the cross, He told His disciples: ***“I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”*** John 16:28 (NIV) Out of great love for sinners, God the Father sent His Son into this world to redeem them from sin, death and hell.

Jesus obediently did what His heavenly Father commanded when He came to this earth. Every commandment of God’s Law that we have broken, Jesus kept perfectly. Every transgression of God’s commandments of which we are guilty, Jesus atoned for by His perfect sacrifice. The Father put His seal of approval on all that Jesus did by raising Him from the dead. After 40 days of showing Himself alive to His followers, Jesus ascended into heaven.

In the words of our text Jesus speaks of going back to the Father and what it would mean for His followers. We have the opportunity to learn some precious truths as we hear how:

JESUS FORETOLD HIS RETURN TO HIS FATHER.

- 1. It would result in sorrow for His followers for a time;**
- 2. But their sorrow would be turned into lasting joy.**

It was before Jesus was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that He told His disciples: ***“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”*** As Jesus had foretold, He was betrayed into the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. The disciples forsook Him and ran away. It was just as the Old Testament Scriptures foretold: ***“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”*** Matthew 26:31 (NIV) Then followed all the events connected with Jesus’ Passion. He was put on trial, suffered, and was sentenced to death. And when Jesus had finished His work of redemption and died for us, His body was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb.

This is when the first ***“little while”*** Jesus spoke of began. After 3 years of His public ministry, after 3 years of being with His disciples and instructing them, Jesus was now separated from them. He was dead and buried. But this was only temporary, for Jesus foretold: ***“... after a little while you will see me.”*** So it was that on Easter Sunday Jesus rose from the dead. On the third day after His burial, Jesus came forth from the tomb and showed Himself alive to His followers.

We know about these things because we have the record of how it all happened in the Bible. But the disciples were bewildered and wondered about Jesus’ words. ***“Some of his disciples said to one another, ‘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.”*** Jesus knew what was on the minds of the disciples and He lovingly explained to them that for a little while they would have sorrow because their Savior was taken from them in death, but that later their sorrow would be turned into joy.

Jesus said: ***“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.”*** The disciples of Jesus did certainly weep and mourn when Jesus died on the cross. It was not only that they were separated from

the One who had been with them in their daily life for 3 years. They did not mourn simply because a close and intimate relationship had come to an end. It was also not only the death of Jesus that caused them sorrow. It was their lack of understanding. They had some pre-conceived ideas about the purpose of their promised Messiah on earth. They had the false idea that their Messiah would redeem them from earthly enemies and establish His kingdom on earth as a victorious earthly king. This lack of understanding is illustrated in the Emmaus disciples on Easter Sunday afternoon. When Jesus appeared to them, He asked: **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?’ ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”** Luke 24:17-21 (NIV) It was especially because of this lack of spiritual understanding that the disciples had such great sorrow when Jesus was taken from them and put to death.

The death of Jesus, however, was a source of rejoicing for the worldly leaders of the Jews. Jesus foretold this also to His disciples: **“you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.”** The unbelieving leaders of the Jews had plotted the death of Jesus. Therefore, when He died, they indeed rejoiced over what they considered a great victory over their bitter enemy. They were filled with glee in an evil sense, as the devil delights in leading someone into sin and bringing about that person’s everlasting damnation.

There is a point for us to consider here. It can be put in the form of a question: How does the suffering and death of Jesus affect us? Does it cause us sorrow? When we hear about the suffering of our Lord and Savior, and how He was so cruelly put to death on a cross, there certainly should be sorrow in our hearts also. But not simply because a man died, and not because some people treated Jesus so shamefully. Our sorrow should be because of our own sins. Our sorrow may be expressed in these words of the hymn-writer:

“Ah! I also and my sin Wrought Thy deep affliction;

This indeed the cause hath been Of Thy crucifixion.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 140, v.3)

This fact we should not try to hide to defend ourselves. We should openly confess as David did: **“I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”** Psalm 51:3-4 (NIV) What David is saying here, and what we ought to acknowledge, is that it would be perfect justice on the part of God to punish us in hell after this life. That is so because we have so often sinned against God’s holy commandments. Even despite all our good intentions we have again and again fallen into temptation and sin. And we have no one to blame but ourselves. That’s a reason for sorrow on our part, and the tears ought to flow freely. We should indeed be troubled by our sins and ask as did the Apostle Paul: **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”** Romans 7:24 (NIV)

Paul also knew the answer to that question and stated it in these words: **“Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** Romans 7:25 (NIV) Through Jesus Christ our Lord we have been redeemed from all our sins, and also from the fear of death and hell’s damnation. This has all been assured to us by the resurrection of our Savior. This is also what Jesus was talking about when He told His disciples that their sorrow would be turned into lasting joy.

2.

Jesus said: **“You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”** Then Jesus gave an example of how grief is turned into joy: **“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”** By this illustration the Lord wanted His disciples to know that His death on the cross would cause them much sorrow, but the same death, followed by the resurrection, would also result in their salvation and thus their lasting joy.

This is the joy we express in word and song in this Easter season. It was His resurrection that Jesus foretold when He said to His disciples: **“after a little while you will see me.”** On the third day after His death,

Jesus rose again in triumphant victory over sin, death and the devil. It had been only a little while of separation, and then He appeared to His disciples, showed them His glorified body, and assured them that He was alive again. For 40 days Jesus appeared to His disciples and gave innumerable proofs of His resurrection. Then, after giving them the great commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, Jesus ascended into heaven and returned to His heavenly Father.

We are now in that ***“little while”*** of time when we do not see Jesus. Comparatively speaking, this life is a little while. As believers in Christ we have the eternity of being with Jesus in heaven to look forward to. So we also apply Jesus’ words in our text: ***“I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”*** O how we long for that time when our grief will be turned into lasting joy! Here on this earth, the Bible says, we ***“must go through many hardships.”*** Acts 14:22 (NIV) Here we experience what Jesus foretold for His followers: ***“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*** John 15:20 (NIV) Sometimes the pressures of earthly tribulations become quite severe and we long for an end to it all. That’s the way the Lord has of causing us to be more heavenly-minded instead of thinking so much about this world and its affairs. In figurative language Paul speaks of our longing for heaven: ***“While we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:4 (NIV)

Let Jesus’ words be our comfort in these sad days in this vale of tears. He says: ***“I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.”*** As we have now heard how Jesus foretold His return to His Father in heaven, let us remember what our Savior has promised: ***“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*** John 14:3 (NIV) When we tend to become discouraged and also depressed because of all the sad things that take place in the world and in the church, let us not forget that soon our Savior will come and take us to be with Him forever. That will be lasting joy, joy that no one takes from us, and joy that is beyond compare. Paul writes: ***“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*** Romans 8:18 (NIV) May the Lord grant us all the strong faith that clings to His Word, so that we may have the glory and joy that is eternal. Amen.

“When we die, dear Savior, When we die, dear Savior,
Grant we pray, On that day That from sorrow Thou wilt lead in mercy To the joy before Thy throne
forever.

At Thy side, Glorified, Oh, may we praise Thee ever! Amen.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 603, v. 4)

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