

Jubilate

30 April, Anno Domini 2023

St. John 16:12-22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just live every day in the brightness and the joy and hope of Easter? The trumpets and the lilies, families together in the pews and around the tables. And more than all that, the burst of hope upon hearing again that the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God who bore our sins upon the cross, is no longer dead! He is alive...forever.

That will always be the reality in which we live, as we are seeing in our study of the revelation granted to St. John. Our Savior and brother sits now and forever at the right hand of God, ruling over all things for us. And when He says all things He truly means ALL things. There is nothing in all of creation that is able to thwart His good and gracious will for you - not poverty, not debilitating diseases, not corrupt government and societies, not even death itself. All of these things are subject to the will of your God and Savior. Your sin and your condemnation have been taken away from you. The head of the ancient serpent, our great and terrible enemy, who is forever prowling around us, has been crushed under the pierced heel of Jesus. Satan, not Jesus, has been destroyed. Death, not Jesus, is dead. Sin, not you, has been condemned. All of these things are eternally true. Nothing in heaven or on earth can undo them any more than you can be unbaptized.

Yet there is still weeping and lamenting. The once bright white trumpeting lilies shrivel up and turn brown. We still have to drive in slow processions to the cemetery. We still have to watch as our children chase after foolishness and lies to their destruction. We still suffer under depression and anxiety. We still have sins to confess and sins to forgive. We still have to listen to unbelieving politicians, coworkers, friends, even family curse us and accuse us in their tolerance of being the evildoers because we dare to confess Christ and refuse to bow down to their gods. We still must fight against our own bodies as they suffer under the myriad of illnesses that plague man and threaten us with death. We must still fight and wrestle every day against selfishness, laziness, anger, lust, and despair that all try to take hold of us and consume us.

“A little while and you will no longer see me,” Jesus said. Dear brothers and sisters, this is our little while. Yes, all the things about Easter are true. But the

final resurrection is not yet here. It is coming but we do not yet live in the eschaton when all of God's children are relieved of all temptations and all evil. There, in the Upper Room, in the very same hour in which our Lord instituted the Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood, Jesus warns His apostles and warns us all that times of darkness and sorrow lay ahead. He lovingly prepares us because He knew there would be weeping and suffering and dying.

And, what's more, the very things that cause us heartache and sorrow, bring the devil's world great pleasure and joy. Just as they cried out for Jesus' death, they cry out for ours because we bear His Name. We are now the face of Christ. The Church and the Christian must suffer as our Lord suffered. We must be made weak and foolish in the eyes of the world, laughed at, spit upon, and falsely accused. We must be prepared to lose jobs and relationships and, yes, perhaps even our lives. The world knows no restraint in its hatred of God and the Word He speaks. It will stop at nothing to silence God's Word so that it no longer has to hear that it is wrong and that its works and its wisdom have been condemned.

"And again a little while, and you will see me," Jesus said. Your sorrows will not endure forever. That is Jesus' promise to you. One day your sadness, your pain, your temptations, your persecutions - all of them will end and never return. Then there will be no more little whiles. There will only be forever - forever peace, forever joy, forever life, forever Christ. That is what is promised to the faithful who persevere.

But until then, God's people must all have this little while of sorrow. None of us can escape it. No Christian is exempt, whatever the false preachers say. Suffering is most certainly not a sign that you are not a Christian. Rather, "The Lord discipline those whom He loves." If the Lord doesn't discipline you, if He doesn't test you in the fire as silver is tested, if He doesn't lay the holy cross upon you then you are not His child. If the world doesn't hate you, if you're not appalled by the wickedness and unbelief that surround you, if your own conscience is never pricked by God's Holy Law, then you have departed the Christian family and the Holy Spirit has departed from you. Christians must suffer and struggle because the world, the devil, and even our own sinful flesh hate the Christ and His Word. You are not an exception. You will not get a pass. There are only two ways out of this little while - falling asleep in Christ or Christ Himself returning on the clouds. Otherwise, you must bear your cross.

We all must. You are not alone in bearing crosses. All your brothers and sisters in Christ must bear theirs. They are not the same. Rather, they are tailor-made for

the Christian. They will find you as you seek to live according to your various vocations. You will be tempted and tested. You will see failure and suffer pain. But you don't need to bear them alone. The cross of Jesus, the cross of salvation, is the only one that couldn't be shared. But we may and truly must share one another's crosses. We are to help each other through this little while. Rather than hiding our crosses and trying to pretend nothing is wrong, let us share them and lighten them. What joy to bear the burdens of our brothers and sisters and to have our own burdens shared. And you have the certain help your heavenly Father who promises that those who wait for Him will renew their strength as they return to the fount and source of our life and our hope - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is true Christian love - love that freely and willingly bears the weaknesses and crosses of others without thought of cost or gain. Love that isn't ashamed of others' weaknesses and doesn't despise them but gladly supports and embraces them. This is what your Lord has gladly and willingly done for you - dying your death, bearing the cross of your sin. And whatever cross you bear now, He continues to bear with you. Your crosses will not overcome you. They are not punishment or retribution. They are the gentle chastening of your loving heavenly Father who would rather keep you safe by suffering in the flesh, then watch you comfortably skip down the broad path that leads to eternal destruction.

Only a little while. That is all you will suffer. And then you will enter into glory. This is the shape your life must take because your life is patterned after that of your Lord. Before He could enter into His bright eternal glory as the Son of Man, He first had to suffer the little while of the cross. It was indeed true suffering. Real, excruciating pain. Real darkness. Real, deep sorrow. But it did end. He knew and trusted the promise of the Father even when His Father turned away His face. You too know the promise of your Heavenly Father and because of Christ He will never turn His face away from you. In the waters of Holy Baptism God has sealed His promises of forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. As surely as He delivered His Son and raised Him from the dead, He will deliver you and raise you from the dead to seat you in His kingdom.

You do not need to despise or run from your crosses like the unbelieving world. You don't need to be afraid of suffering or pain or sorrow. These are holy gifts of God laid upon those whom He loves that He may draw you ever closer to Himself. He wants you desire what is needed and what He alone can give - salvation, forgiveness, life, and peace. He holds before you His Body and Blood in the midst of your sadness that you may have peace, that you may know your suffering is not in vain. Your little while will end according to God's gracious will and you will

see Jesus again forever. And in that day of joy, the suffering that you now endure and that often perplexes you, will find its perfect fulfillment. It will be overshadowed by the joy of Christ and you will be perfectly content. In that day the lilies will forever bloom, death will be but a faint memory, the victorious trumpet blasts will never be silenced, and tears will never again fill your eyes.

May the Holy Spirit grant you peace and contentment now in the communion fellowship of Christ with His Baptized as together we make our way through this little while of sorrow to the eternity of joy.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.