

John 16.16-22
Jubilate, the 4th Sunday of Easter
0815 Divine Service 12 May 2019
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Right here in the middle of Easter, the most joyous season of the church year. We just got done proclaiming at the top of our lungs the cardinal truth of our Faith: Christ is risen! He's risen, and death is defeated. He's risen, and left our sins and their power dead like the heap of grave clothes lying in His grave. He's risen, and the kingdom Satan founded has been destroyed. But right here, in the middle of Easter, in the middle of this most joyous season of the church year, well, it's like we've just stumbled onto Debbie Downer Sunday.

For just as the Lord Christ through His resurrection has promised you the forgiveness of all of your sins and rescue from death and the devil, here in the Gospel for today He makes another promise: "A little while and you will not see Me....Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice."

Of course, those words were first pronounced to the 11 faithful on Maundy Thursday evening. Judas had already left to fulfill his own promise—his own *demonic* promise. He'd bring a troop of thugs. Have Jesus apprehended. Brought before a kangaroo court. Charged with a capital crime He didn't commit. And be hung on a cross to die like a worthless, no-good scoundrel. And then, in just a matter of hours, Jesus' words would be fulfilled: "A little while and you will not see Me."

Only a matter of hours until the dear eleven would have their Jesus ripped away from them.

Only a matter of hours until the joy of the Passover—the joy of feasting in faith on the Lord's great redemption from Egypt—would give way to the heart-rending, shameful, horrifying way in which that lesser Passover must be fulfilled.

Only a matter of hours until Jesus, who promised them an eternal rescue from sin and death, would Himself be put to death, and their hopes crushed.

And then all the world—everyone—set against them. Laughing them to scorn. What a joke their faith turned out to be—a dead "Savior"! And nothing—nothing at all—would indicate to them anything else than that they were without hope, without rescue, without safety and salvation, without...God Himself.

That's why they locked themselves away in the upper room. Because Jesus, their Friend and Rabbi, their Teacher and Lord and Savior, lay dead. Just as cold as the stone into which His grave had been carved.

Yes. This *is* Debbie Downer Sunday.

But maybe...just maybe...it's exactly the Sunday that you need. Maybe...just maybe...all the joy of the Easter season hasn't resonated with you at all. And maybe...just maybe...Jesus Christ is as dead to you as He was to the disciples when He lay in the grave.

That's the kind of darkness and depression that Jesus is talking about. It's not just worldly darkness and depression. It's not just the darkness of a tough year for taxes or losing your job or, even worse, a loved one. It's not just the depressive mood you fall into when things really aren't going right in your life, in your mind. It's the kind of darkness and depression when you seem to yourself dead in Christ and Christ dead in you.

That's how it was for the disciples. Their dear Lord Christ lay dead; and all they had staked on Him—that lay dead, too. And all the while the world was doing nothing but dancing a jig.

But this is how it must be. That's what Jesus is saying. "A little while and you will not see Me." You have and hold Jesus now. You have Him as your Victor over sin and death. Satan is defanged. These things are most certainly true.

But a little while, and you will not see Him.

His victory over your sin turns into your defeat at the hands of your sin. And Christ seems to you dead.

His victory over your death turns into your defeat at the cold hands of death. And Christ seems to you dead.

And Satan sprouts fangs, plaguing conscience and heart. And Christ seems to you dead.

And all three—sin, death, and devil—array themselves against you and read to you from another catechism that is not Christ's. And teach you that you are not and cannot be Christ's. That whatever Christ has done for you—well, you must've needed more, because is this how one of Christ's disciples should live and think and speak? You can't and won't pray because...what does it matter anyway? You can't and won't drag yourself to church because ... what's the point?

Pastors are particularly susceptible to this—for they must stand in the place of Christ and represent Him, but with a flesh and Old Adam that's tireless and relentless and a conscience that for that reason is constantly under assault.

And that's exactly when that first "little while" kicks in. When Christ seems dead to you and you seem dead in Christ. No longer one of His living members. Just a dry twig that must be pruned off the living branch. And you lament.

But the world? Oh, you haven't ever seen quite so much joy. Packed with all the spite of their 2,000-year-old cry "Crucify, crucify!" And all the venom of "If you truly are the Son of God, then surely You can't be dead! Come down from Your cross! Hahaha!"

But all of this happens in order to teach you that what you have you have by faith and not by sight. Let me say that again: all of this happens in order to teach you that what you have you have by faith and not by sight—by faith in the promises of the Son of God. And to teach you that, whatever you have, you don't have it of yourself, but of Christ. So that you can look at the sin and death and hell to which you seem lost and which seem to have swallowed up Christ Himself and say, "Though sin still has it way with

me from time to time, it never did with my Lord Christ. And He has put my sin to death in His death and promised that their power over me is broken. Though I will die, so did my Lord Christ. But He is also risen from the dead and has promised to raise me on the Last Day. And though I feel myself hell-bound, my Lord Christ has already run His once-for-all victory lap around hell and gone off to the winner's circle in heaven. And there He's already readied a place for me right alongside Him."

All of that—all of that you hold by faith, not by sight. All of that you hold because of what Christ has promised you. Not because of what the world says. In fact, despite what the world says. And you know that of that is yours because you have God's Word and His Sacraments, constantly preaching to you that these things are so. Even for you.

That's life in the little while. It's a life of Christian sorrow and lamentation; and the world does nothing but laugh and jeer and cheer.

But let's turn back to Jesus' words once again. "A little while and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy."

The disciples didn't understand Jesus. They had to live it before they got it. Their Lord Jesus was taken from them. Crucified. Laid in a grave. They had nothing but fear and despair. Eternal fear and despair. Because their eternal good had been taken from them. And when the women returned breathless from the grave. And explained what they had seen. But they still didn't get it. What the women said seemed to the eleven nothing more than an idle tale. That should have been a moment of joy. In fact, *the* moment when everlasting joy overtook them never to leave them.

For upon the time of sorrow the Lord Jesus had imposed a limit. He had called it just "a little while." Christ had been ripped away from them. He was dead. If they had clung to His word and not to what they were seeing. If they had held Christ by faith and not by sight. If they had believed His word, "A little while," instead of thinking all had been lost forever, oh, what comfort they would have had even in the face of their greatest enemies. That's why Christ gave them that word, "a little while." For their comfort. But as far as they were concerned Christ was not only dead, He was even as good as dead. And utterly useless.

In fact, it wasn't until the risen Lord Jesus actually appeared to them on the road to Emmaus and in the upper room that they understood. He stood before them, the one who had given them the comfort of that simple word, "a little while,"—He stood before them, triumphant from the grave, the little while ended. And then, their sorrow did indeed turn to joy; lament gave way to rejoicing. Depression was expelled by elation. And their sadness crumbled. They were glad to see the Lord.

And then they got it. He had left and laid aside the glory of the right hand of His Father. Come into their flesh. Suffered death and hell on His holy cross. For them. And then, just as He'd promised, He returned to the glory from which He had come. He harrowed hell. He rose victorious from the grave, never to die again. For them. And then He came and stood among them. And what seemed like great loss? Now they saw it for it was—the derring-do of the mighty Son of God for their redemption.

Of course, it had looked just the opposite. It had looked like an utter failure. How can a shepherd protect His own sheep by dying? How can death be defeated by succumbing to it? How can sin be destroyed and its power broken by putting the Sinless to death? And how can the Victim be victorious over hell? There's no answer to it. It's all upside down. It makes no sense.... Unless you listen to the Word of Christ.

For in that Word, “a little while,” He promises by death to defeat death. He, though sinless, promises to be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He, the Victim, promises to emerge as the Victor.

But that’s how it is in God’s world. What strikes the eye is nothing, even defeat.

But faith—faith rooted and formed by God’s holy Word—faith sees it as God sees it.

The eye of flesh looks at little Landon’s Baptism here and sees nothing but a quaint rite; but the eye of faith sees it for what it is: a great and mighty thing through which God forgives sins and rescues him from death and the devil.

The ear of flesh hears nothing but a pastor’s voice. But faith hears that sins are forgiven.

The eye of the body sees nothing but a manufactured wafer and the tongue of the body tastes nothing but cheap wine. But the eye of faith sees the Body broken for its salvation; and the tongue of faith tastes eternal life.

That’s our comfort in this “little while.”

Seems like small potatoes. But hardly. Hardly. Instead, those things—water, pastor’s voice, bread, wine—they are tokens of the promise that Christ has imposed a limit on our time of sorrow. It will only last a while.

And then, then, you shall see Him again. And your sorrow will turn to joy. Eternal joy.

For just as Christ is risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, so will you.

And that—that’s enough to turn any Sunday, even Debbie Downer Sunday, into a day of great joy.

Amen.

pax dei, etc.

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