

JUBILATE / THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: St. John 16:16-22

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The human brain is a complex organ. It holds more information and is infinitely more complex than any supercomputer and so-called AI, artificial intelligence. The brain can learn, make decisions, and act on them in a split second without you even being consciously aware of what is happening. The brain can remember things even down to the most minute detail. It can compartmentalize, catalog, categorize, file, and multitask; it can regulate body functions such as heart rate and blood pressure, even body temperature, and numerous other involuntary functions required to keep you alive and well.

The brain can even, and I am sure this is no great revelation for most of us, forget. I am not just talking about forgetting where you left your car keys, forgetting your wedding anniversary, or your spouse's birthday, or why you might have walked into a room only to forget why you did so as you stand and stare dumbly about. I am talking about the brain's capability to forget unpleasant things such as physical pain, mental anguish, fear, and despair.

I do not necessarily mean that you forget that some experience was painful, though I suppose that is possible as well, but we do not normally remember the actual physical pain. We may recall that something hurt, and even hurt greatly, but thankfully, with our remembering, we do not normally actually feel or physically experience the pain again. This is the brain's way of protecting itself and our sanity. And in the case of childbirth, this may well be God's mechanism for preserving mankind since how many women among you would consent to the pain of childbirth more than once if the pain could be so easily recalled and experienced? Thank God that our brain efficiently forgets the pain.

JESUS, in our Gospel text for Jubilate Sunday, refers not to forgetting, but to overcoming. He says, *"A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."* JESUS is speaking of the pain and anguish of childbirth being overcome by the pure joy and love of a mother for her newborn child. Such pain, such travail, is soon forgotten, overcome by the joy of birth and the ecstasy and love of a mother for her newborn child. The joy of a mother who has just given birth to a healthy child can be compared to no other earthly joy. Her heart rejoices and no one can take that joy from her.

So, it is, in the life of a Christian as it is lived out on this side of eternity. For in this world, the Christian life is not lived out in perfect celestial bliss, rather, it is lived out under the pain of a cross.

Just as a woman during the travail of pregnancy and the birth of her child, we all suffer from the effects of the Law, intent on but one thing, the joy to come. As God said to Eve, *“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”* Yet, not only this but also to the serpent, *“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”* God did not leave Eve, nor you without hope.

So, we should not be surprised that in this life we Christians struggle under the burden of the Law, forgiven, certainly, but all the time clinging with all our might to the promise of God made ours through Baptism into the life, death, and resurrection of JESUS. As the Bride of CHRIST, we await the consummation, that is, the fulfillment of our joy, even while we yet suffer the temporal effects of sin due to the breaking of God’s Law.

Thus, our focus is not to be on the sufferings of this life, but on the return of CHRIST and the attending promised joys to come. For our desire is to be for JESUS, our Husband. Thus, no end can satisfy a Christian, save that which is found in CHRIST JESUS who is eternal. Our one and only hope is to be under His loving and gracious rule forever.

It is, then, as JESUS said, *“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come....”* In this world, you will have trouble. The Christian life, the life we live, is lived out in the *“little while”* of heartache and pain, sickness, suffering, and death.

Thus, our Gospel text teaches us to focus not on the *“little while”* of suffering in this life, but on the eternal joys which we have in CHRIST JESUS, and which we will have to the full at His second coming.

“But Pastor,” you might be tempted to say, *“no one can know the suffering I am experiencing. One cannot possibly understand until one has walked in my shoes.”* Our LORD’s reply might sound like this, *“True, my child, but it is for this purpose that I took on human flesh. I have suffered as you do. I have been tempted as you have been tempted. I am not only fully God, but also fully human. My love and My care for you are born not only of Divine Compassion, but also from real human suffering. I have walked a mile in your shoes and I have hung on your cross. All things I have done, I have done for you. All things I have endured, I have endured for you. Therefore, your suffering has been Mine. Your pain, sadness, and despair, all have been Mine. Your death is Mine. All this is Mine that, what has always been Mine alone, can now be yours. If My Baptism has sanctified your Baptism, making you holy, has not My suffering and death upon the Cross, has not my tribulation also sanctified your cross, your suffering, your tribulation?”* As the writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us: *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*

False, then, are the churches and their pastors who preach a theology of glory, a theology that teaches that the true Christian life is without pain or suffering. JESUS preaches just the

opposite message to you in our Gospel text: *“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament,”* JESUS says, *“but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful.”* Later, JESUS tells His disciples *“In the world you will have tribulation.”* Still, it seems the natural tendency for sinful humanity is to flock to the churches and cults that preach health and wealth while the churches that preach the suffering of the Cross, more often than not, seem to stagnate, and oftentimes, to shrink. Why should this be?

Could it be that the itching ears of God’s people turn away from the truth and pursue a lie because they find the lie more comfortable, more palatable, and more relevant to their felt needs? Can it be that what we sinners really desire is the easy path and the wide gate over the narrow gate and the more difficult way? Do you really want to avoid any kind of suffering at all costs, even at the cost of your immortal soul? JESUS once said, *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* Was JESUS talking to you? Indeed, He was!

You see, the *“Glory Train”* preached by false teachers will inevitably jump the tracks and when it does the train wreck will be a great disaster of Biblical proportions, for when one believes that true Christians endure no suffering, what happens to faith when suffering comes? Does your suffering mean God has deserted you? If you are tormented by disease of mind, body, or spirit, if you become depressed for any reason, does it mean your faith is not strong enough or does it mean that God does not love or care about you anymore? If one believes that one’s prosperity or comfort is the true measure of God’s love, what happens when one’s world comes crashing down around him or her?

The theology of glory tells you that if you are a *“true”* Christian, God will bless you and all you do. Your life will show the fruits of true faith marked by the joy, the happiness, the stuff in your life. But friends, if this is the case, what, then, is the difference between a Christian and an unbelieving pagan? Does God not bring rain equally on the just and the unjust? Is God not the giver of all good things to both evil and good? Do we not confess that God gives bread even to all evil people, and this even without our prayers? (cf. Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, The Lord’s Prayer, the 4th petition; see also, St. Matthew 5:45)

The theology of glory, that is, a theology which preaches that true faith will bring you health, wealth, and happiness in this life, is no Gospel at all, spoken by false prophets who preach peace where there is no peace, to a suffering people living in a dying world.

JESUS suffered the pain and death of crucifixion to give birth to His Church in water and Blood in order that the sorrows of this life would last for no more than a season and our joy in CHRIST, and the promised life to come, would be everlasting. The pains and sufferings of this life are fleeting and transitory, they last no more than a moment and then are gone. In their place will be a joy; a joy complete and unending; a joy no one can take away from you.

Now, as you live through this *“little while”* of suffering, keep your eye on the prize—the long while, the never-ending moment in the unending Day of our LORD. For while the

emptiness of sorrow and the desperateness of despair last only a little while, then comes heavenly joy which will be without end and the peace which surpasses all human understanding. Is this not a blessing that far surpasses any temporal heartache?

While you are in that *“little while”* of impatient, despondent sorrow, do not be like the pregnant woman who dreads the pain on the day of her delivery. Instead, think of the joy of the woman who has just given birth and whose happiness cannot be restrained. For *“as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”*

Behold! This little while of suffering that we now know is nothing more than birth pangs—a passing from the baptismal womb of the Church into the eternal light of CHRIST, where we are loosed from the pains and sufferings of death and raised up a new life in CHRIST Jesus.

How long must you wait? Does it really matter? It is but a little while. And when the time of this little while is fulfilled and JESUS returns for you on the clouds of heaven, all your suffering will be forgotten and your unending joy will begin. Until that time, turn with joy to the gifts our LORD gives to you in His Word through your Baptism and His life-giving Flesh and Blood, gifts given to forgive you, uphold your faith, and renew your strength for this present hour, and sustain you until the life to come where all pain, sorrow, and suffering cease.

In this, you may rightly rejoice, for it is a joy no one can take from you. In it can be heard a blessed Word that no devil or enemy of God can undo, for in it JESUS says unto you, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

✠ ✠ ✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠ ✠ ✠

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida
4/21/24 A✠D