

Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy

5 of Easter

Pastor Josh Frazee

John 16:12-22

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

We have trouble in this life. We have anxieties in this life. We have burdens put upon us by the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh. And Jesus does not tell us in our text from the Gospel of John that those things are going to go away in this lifetime.

Rather, Jesus tells us that more will come.

That is what a clear reading of this text says. But Luther has noted in his commentary on it that there are those who would want to put a different twist on this text. They teach that when Jesus says the Spirit will come to teach us, it means that the Spirit will give us new teachings or new commands—especially through the leadership of other denominations. Yet Luther wrote what is of the utmost importance regarding this text and every other one when it comes to leaders for the church. He wrote: “he (the leader) should say: ‘Christ has entrusted His Word to me. I am to preach it, nothing more. You do not have to believe me, nor do I have to believe you; but we must all hear and believe the Word of the Lord (Luther’s Works, Vol. 24).’”

Jesus promised to send one Helper—the Holy Spirit. That means that every other leader of the Church from Jesus’ departure until His return is *not* that Helper. Every other leader is *not* to be put on par with Him. We should not listen to the words and commands of any preacher, bishop, pope, or anyone else as though hearing from Jesus Himself. Jesus said that the Helper He would send would not speak His own words, but what He has heard. In other words, the Spirit will guide us into the Truth of the Word—that Word which Christ has already given us. And the Word He has already given us is all about His life, death, and resurrection. The Spirit will work in us through that Word and the Sacraments—nothing more, nothing less, nothing new.

Verse 1

“[Jesus said,] ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.’”

If Jesus must send His Holy Spirit—whom He calls the Spirit of Truth—to us to lead us into the truth, can we get to it in any other way? If we could understand God’s Word simply by human reasoning, wouldn’t everyone believe it? And if human reasoning could grasp it, would our reasoning continue to hold on to it once suffering came because of it? Far too often human reasoning believes that the right way is the way of least resistance. Yet Jesus tells us that His way comes with crosses to be born and suffering and humiliation to be received. Would not human reason throw out Christianity since it is not the path of least resistance?

Our reasoning can only work with the variables with which it has been given. It can work with physical things and emotional things. But it cannot grasp the spiritual ones. Again, if it could, would we have needed Jesus to send us the Holy Spirit? The answer is no; if we could understand spiritual things already, there would be no purpose for the Holy Spirit to come to lead us into the Truth, to “take what is [Jesus’] and declare it to you [and me].”

In just a short time after our text, it will be Pentecost. At Pentecost, Jesus will send His disciples the Holy Spirit. Today, now that the Spirit has come, all those who are Christians recognize that the world does not know the Truth. Indeed it cannot without Jesus and His Holy Spirit. So the Christian resigns himself or herself

to being mocked and treated shamefully for the sake of the Gospel, in order that as many as can be brought to the Truth will be.

Verse 2

“[Jesus continued speaking] ‘A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.’ So some of his disciples said to one another, ‘What is this that he says to us, “A little while, and you will not see me; and again, a little while, and you will see me”? and “because I am going to the Father”?’ So they were saying, ‘What does he mean by “a little while”? We do not know what he is talking about.’”

Today we have the Holy Spirit leading us into Jesus’ Word so that we hear and understand and believe it. At the time of our text, again, before Jesus’ crucifixion and death, the disciples didn’t have the Spirit guiding them as to what Jesus meant. And most certainly their human reasoning would not have led them to the Truth. What human being could have imagined a God taking on human flesh—let alone a God taking on human flesh and dying—let alone a God taking on human flesh and dying for the sins of His people who had turned against Him? No one; no one could have imagined such an event. Human reasoning and emotion could never have led to that understanding. And so the disciples questioned among themselves what this could possibly mean, saying, “We do not know what he is talking about.”

And today also, our human reasoning and emotion could never lead us to what truly happened on that day two thousand some odd years ago. It could never believe that God would die for us. It would not believe that He died for such a sinner as you and me. Yet that is the very Truth to which the Holy Spirit guides us, now that He has been sent to us.

In a text a little down the road from today, the disciples will thank Jesus for speaking plainly with them—not using figures of speech or parables. Yet it would still be the Spirit who would cause them to understand and believe Jesus’ Words, both then and when the Spirit would be sent in full at Pentecost.

In our text today, Jesus only alludes to His crucifixion saying He would be going away from them. But even in texts when He would speak more plainly, the disciples did not understand what He meant—or that He should do such a thing. Surely God should not *die*. Still, Jesus made His march toward Jerusalem and to the cross to do just that. Jesus allowed Himself—God in human flesh, Immanuel—to be nailed to a cross, to suffer hell, complete separation from God the Father, and to die for all humanity.

Verse 3

“Jesus knew that [His disciples] wanted to ask him, so he said to them, ‘Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, “A little while and you will see me”? 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.’”

Jesus’ disciples would weep and lament when He would be crucified and die. It would seem that the devil and the world had won. But then their sorrow would be made into joy when He would rise from the dead that Third Day—that Sunday morning. And His resurrection would assure all believers for all time that those who would believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life. So that joy would never be able to be taken from them.

As we well know, that doesn't mean that Satan, the world, and our flesh don't continue to fight against us—putting bulls eyes on us at our baptism—and warring against us until we die. Yet come what may, even if they take goods, fame, child, or wife, those unholy three cannot take the joy that we have in Jesus' resurrection.

That joy doesn't mean we won't weep when others die or when the devil and the world wage war against us. It doesn't mean we will always have smiles on our faces. But it does mean that no one will snatch us out of Jesus' hand.

Even today, some of us may weep as I finish my final sermon. But along with Luther I will say: “Christ has entrusted His Word to me. I am to preach it, nothing more. You do not have to believe me, nor do I have to believe you; but we must all hear and believe the Word of the Lord”—that Word which is all about Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, from whom and because of whom we have that joy that never ends. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Special Votum: The One who has begun this good work in you will bring it to completion on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when all the dead are raised and we see our joy with our own eyes, even Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.