

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)

Jubilate – May 8, 2022

John 16:16-22 – Only a Little While

By Vicar Peter Wagner

Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!* Amen. Our text is from the Gospel, from John chapter 16. Jesus said, **“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.”** This is our text.

The fourth Sunday of Easter. *Jubilate* Sunday, in Latin. **“Shout for joy to God, all the earth!”** we proclaimed in the Introit. In English, we could call it “jubilate” Sunday. Jubilate means, “Burst into joyous song! Dance and celebrate jubilantly!” Jubilate because the Savior is risen for our redemption. Like King David in 2 Samuel 6, when he brought the ark into Jerusalem and danced before the Lord with all his might, with shouting and with the sound of the horn.<sup>1</sup> And today we’re gathered in the presence not of a wooden box of the ark, but of the living Christ! That should make us rejoice far more enthusiastically than David.

Well, with a little restraint. This is a Lutheran church, after all. Keep your composure. No dancing, no shouts of “Praise the Lord!” while I’m preaching, please. That would ruin my train of thought. Listen eagerly, but keep it in bounds. When you go up for communion today and receive total forgiveness of all your sins, be jubilant, but don’t grin. Return to your pew perfectly somber, with a straight face, as if you’ve received your death sentence at the altar, not your guarantee of eternal life.

Of course I’m being tongue-in-cheek. We have to poke a little fun at ourselves. It’s appropriate that we act solemnly in our worship because we have the holy things of God here, God’s word and sacraments. They deserve dignity. We proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes again – this is most solemn indeed. It’s sobering to realize that God gave his blood for my sins. So we should rejoice with dignity. We should gladly honor the means by which God brings us joy.

It’s also hard to jubilate and dance around and sing praise to God for all his awesome deeds when we just don’t feel it. For many of you, your worship is bittersweet, since your loved ones are not here with you. Perhaps they are ill. Perhaps they’ve moved to another state. Or perhaps they’ve departed from the church altogether. Or they’ve departed to be with Jesus. In this evil world we always experience the sadness of parting. How gut-wrenching it must have felt when the disciples watched their beloved Lord departing into heaven! That’s why we need to gather together for worship. Gathering is the opposite of parting. Gathering in this sanctuary helps undo our pain, it turns our sorrow into a little piece of heaven. Here we are never separated from Jesus. He’s present to comfort us and turn our sorrow into joy.

Jesus illustrated his sermon about turning sorrow into joy with the example of a woman in childbirth. He said, **“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”** How appropriate to read these words on Mother’s Day! Every mother among us has experienced what Jesus is talking about. When her hour of labor comes, she’s filled with sorrow. Partly because it’s going to hurt a lot, but mostly because childbirth is scary, filled with unknowns. She’s fearful of what could go wrong, that she might be parted from this child she never met. She loves her baby and longs to hold it in her arms. But she can’t control what happens. It’s all in God’s hands, and it’s terrifying. Labor can be long, drawn out, hours and days of anguish. But then the baby’s finally born, and he’s healthy and beautiful, and her sorrow is turned to joy. And even though the pain doesn’t all go away at once, she no longer notices it. It doesn’t matter, because her baby is here.

But after the baby is born, the first days and months turn into years, and the mother’s fears for her child never disappear. How will he turn out when he’s grown up? Will he ever get out of the clingy toddler phase? Will he ever be potty trained? Will he ever take school seriously? Will he ever treat his parents with respect? Will he hurt himself or do something that ruins his life? Will he depart from the faith? And what about his future? Will he ever get married? Will he ever have grandkids? Will he ever get them baptized? So she experiences continual worry, prayer, and sorrow over her child. It’s scary because it’s beyond her control. She can only pray. Only God can preserve him. Her sorrow could never be turned to joy if God were not faithful beyond all hope. God loves this child even more than she can. This is his own child claimed at baptism. Jesus never stops calling him, reminding him of his love, forgiving his sins. So on Mother’s Day, we all owe special thanks to our mothers.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel 6:14-15

They've suffered so much for us because they love us so much, more than we'll ever realize. Our lives truly depend on their righteous prayers.

Jesus' sermon about mothers illustrates how all Christians experience sorrow. We are sojourners and exiles in this vale of tears. But Jesus promises that just as a mother's pain and fear vanish when God safely delivers the baby – just like what keeps her going through the pain of labor is the hope of the joy on the other side – so our pain and fear will all vanish in an instant. **“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”** Our sorrow will vanish in the moment we see Jesus.

If only we could see him sooner. Lord Jesus, we know we'll see you on the other side of death, just as you promised the thief on the cross, **“Today you will be with me in paradise.”**<sup>2</sup> We know we'll see you on the other side of the new creation, when this earth passes away and you come again in glory. You said it would only be a little while, but it's been so long. Come soon, Jesus! Come soon, because we can't endure much longer. Not on our own, at least. The church is falling apart. It's divided into hundreds of little denominations, all squabbling with each other. It's filled with unbelievers. It's hated and scorned by the whole world. The world rejoices to see us destroying ourselves by our own hypocrisy! If you don't come soon, Jesus, it seems to us like there will be nothing left of your bride, no one to celebrate at the marriage feast of the Lamb, no jubilant hearts to receive you.

Our sorrow will vanish in the moment we see Jesus. Before we even pray these things, he's given the answer. Before any of it took place, he loved us and reassured us. **“You have sorrow now,”** he said, **“but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** Jesus spoke these words on Maundy Thursday, the night when he was betrayed. Only a little while later the disciples wept when they laid him in the tomb. But again in a little while, in three days they saw him again at Easter. So these long centuries of sorrowful waiting are only a little while. The ages will be forgotten when we see him coming on the clouds of heaven, coming to bring us to the good place he's gone to prepare.

And we so easily forget that Jesus is with us right here, right now in this little while. We can't see his glory, we can't see his face. But we hear his voice in the words of the pastor, pronouncing our sins are all forgiven. We see his body and blood in the Lord's Supper. And that should turn our sorrow into joy, because it's our Lord's own guarantee that he has not abandoned us. On the night he was betrayed, as he took up the bread and the wine, he said it would only be a little while.

So when you go back to your pew after communion, it's okay to smile. Because in communion you've tasted and seen that the Lord is good. He's faithful, he promises to preserve his bride the Church, to come take her to heaven soon. But it's also okay to be solemn, because although you have these promises, they are still not yet. The waiting hurts a lot. It seems like he'll never come. It's hard to trust that he's in control. He will come at the right time, just as he delivers a healthy baby at just the right moment, when the mother thinks she can't take it any longer.

Maybe that's why, when we go up for communion, it's so comforting to think about those on the other side of the altar, those whose wait is already over. We could imagine the other side of the communion rail, beyond that front wall, out in the courts of heaven. When you kneel at this rail, you are sharing this feast with the saints triumphant kneeling just over there, singing with joy forever at the marriage feast of the Lamb. The Lamb who was slain is right in the middle on the altar, in his body and blood. He's the focal point of us both. We're looking at Jesus, and so are they. They see him more clearly than we do, because he's already dried their tears. But they jubilate about the same thing we see. Our vision is only blurred by our tears.

The saints above drink the same wine we drink, they taste the same food we eat. Isn't wine a perfect picture of the sweetness and bitterness we all share? Wine mixed with myrrh is the bitter drink they gave our Lord on the cross to numb his pain. But wine is also the drink of celebration he gave at the wedding at Cana. The wine we taste in the chalice is bitter, because now we weep and lament. But the wine we'll taste in heaven – and the saints triumphant already taste it! – that's the sweet wine of jubilation. And as we wait, we can already catch a little taste of that sweet heavenly cup.

Isaiah 40:31, **“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”**<sup>3</sup> Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Praise the Lord! Amen. Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in the risen Christ, unto life everlasting. Amen.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 23:43

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 40:31