

May 15, 2022
Fifth Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 16:12-22 (Revelation 21:1-7)

YOUR SORROW WILL TURN TO JOY.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 16th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

The empty tomb on Easter morning turns your sorrow into joy. That is your *hope*. When I say: “*That is your hope...*,” don’t let the word “*hope*” steal your joy by allowing worldly *hope* to be confused with Christian *hope*. Worldly *hope* and Christian *hope* are two different things.

The dictionary definition of the word “*hope*” is: “*a feeling of expectation and desire.*” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary) Worldly *hope* is a feeling... a fluttering sensation inside somewhere... a desire. But Christian *hope* is entirely different. Christian *hope* is confident trust in what is not seen. (cf: Hebrews 11:1). Christian *hope* is grounded on the promise of our Triune God, that for the sake of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, Christ will return in glory on the Last Day and bring all who believe into His new creation.

God gave St John a glimpse of this new creation in a revelation. In our epistle reading this morning St John describes the new creation this way:

“³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3–4)

This is your *hope* in Christ Jesus. Because of Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection on your behalf, whatever your situation and circumstance in life, hardship and want, sickness and pain, oppression and persecution from the world, you can fix your eyes in the new heaven and new earth where you will one day live in a resurrected and glorified body with Christ in His kingdom forever. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:42–49) Present suffering gives way to future joy. Darkness gives way to light. Death gives way to life. Weeping in sadness turns into tears of joy because of Christ’s resurrection.

In this world a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (cf: Matthew 10:24) You will have suffering and sorrow. It is the cost of discipleship. It is the cost of taking up one's cross and losing one's life for the sake of Jesus. (cf: Matthew 16:24–25) But the end is not in this world experiencing sufferings or the cross. The end is the joy of life in the Kingdom of God in eternity.

For these last three weeks of the season of Easter, our Gospel texts take place in the Upper Room on the night before Jesus' crucifixion. His earthly ministry is about to come to an end. He has an appointment to be put to death on the cross the next day, so in these last hours He is imparting as much information to His disciples as they can grasp. There is much more that remains to be said, but they cannot bear any more. (cf: John 16:12) Anything more they would not understand. They are suffering from information overload compounded by their fragile state of faith mixed with sorrow of grief at the thought of Jesus leaving them.

Jesus has told His disciples all that they needed for salvation. As He looked into their faces just hours before His betrayal, He saw their uncertainty, fear, doubt, sadness. So, He comforts them with the promise of sending them a Helper, the Holy Spirit of truth, who will guide them into a clearer understanding of God's truth as they make their way into the future. (cf: John 16:12–15) Jesus has a mission. It is what the prophets had foretold. It is why He left the glory of heaven and took on the flesh of man. It was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things. (cf: Luke 24:25–26) Jesus said to them:

“A little while, and you will see me no longer...” (John 16:16)

What sounded like a riddle would the next day turn into prophesy fulfilled as the disciples no longer saw Jesus. His beaten and crucified dead body was taken down from the cross, laid in the tomb, and a huge stone was rolled in front, sealing the tomb. With their Lord's dead body secure in the tomb, the disciples would weep and lament, while at the same time, the devil and the world would rejoice for they thought that Jesus was defeated.

Whatever brings sorrow to the saints brings joy to the sinners. But as He often does, Jesus flips things on its head. He had promised them that in a little while they would see Him again and their sorrow would turn into joy. (cf: John 16:16, 20) And they did see Him risen from the dead. Their Good Friday anguish and sorrow turned into Easter morning joy at His appearance to Mary, then the disciples, and then to Thomas. (cf: John 20:16, 19, 27) All the darkness and death of Good Friday was swallowed up in joy and light. Jesus is alive. He is risen indeed.

But why did this all have to take place? Was it just so we would have an exciting climax to a compelling story? No. All these things were necessary. If Jesus only dies, and the disciples never see Him alive again, it means that He was never raised from the grave. If Christ was not raised from the grave, you and I are without Christian hope. St Paul writes:

“... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:15–19)

If there is no resurrection there is no joy, there is no hope, there is no gift of the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into proclaiming the faith to the early Church and inspiring them to record Holy Scripture through which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in us today. If Jesus only dies, then sin and Satan win because it would mean that death has defeated Jesus just as it has been defeating people since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. (cf: Genesis 3:1–7)

But Jesus is not only crucified, dies, and is buried. It was He ***Himself*** who laid down His life in order that He may take it up again. (cf: John 10:17–18) His sacrifice on the cross redeemed you from sin and death. If He had remained in the grave, His victory over death and the grave would be incomplete. Christ's complete act of redemption, what we call the Gospel, is the death ***and*** resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and the hope of your own resurrection and everlasting life.

The empty tomb on Easter morning turns your sorrow into joy. That is your ***hope***. That is your joy. But the devil desires to steal your hope. He wants to destroy your joy. He wants to keep you bound to your sin. He wants you to believe that your sins are too big for Christ, and that His suffering, death, and resurrection is not sufficient to save you. He wants you to doubt and to despair. He wants you to dwell on your life and your sufferings and get all emotional in your situation and circumstances – and then look at the pleasures and treasures of the world, and whether or not you are healthy, wealthy, and wise.

If he can get you to set your heart and mind on the things that you see and hear and experience in this life, he has you in his pocket of doubt and despair. You will doubt that God is in control, or that He cares for you, or He even exists. You will despair that God has given up on you, or that your life is meaningless, or that eternal salvation is some fantasy world within the lunatic fringe. When you take your eyes off the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus – and – allow the trials and tribulations and sufferings which are part of living in this broken and sinful world to take over and steal your heart and mind from Christ and His promises, the devil has stolen your hope. He has deceived you and taken away your hope, your joy, and your eternity.

It is not just you. You are not alone. It is part of Original Sin clinging to your flesh. You and me and all mankind bear the sinful mortal nature of our ancestors Adam and Eve. The Good News is, God has neither forgotten nor forsaken you. From before the foundation of the world, God chose you in Christ, that you should be holy and blameless before him. (cf: Ephesians 1:3–4) St Paul writes:

“In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the empty tomb on Easter morning turns your sorrow into joy. The message of Easter is that God's enemies did not win. Sin, death, and the devil did not win. And the world will never win. From before the foundation God saw you dead in sin and trespasses and put together His plan of salvation for you through Jesus earthly life, suffering, death, and resurrection. In Baptism you put on Christ, making you holy and blameless in His sight. (cf: Galatians 3:27) It was there that you were united to Christ's death and resurrection. And just as sure as Christ was raised from the dead, all who are in Christ will one day be resurrected like Him and walk in the newness of life. (cf: Romans 6:3-5) In the washing of the water and the

Word, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of your inheritance awaiting you in heaven. (cf: Ephesians 1:13–14) It is the same Holy Spirit who guided the apostles in their proclamation of the Gospel and inspired them to record Holy Scripture.

Just as Jesus and the apostles suffered from persecution and affliction, so too, will you and me. Today you have sorrow, but in a little while, Christ will return in glory and your joy will be made full, and no one will take your joy away from you. Until the resurrection on the Last Day, hold fast and trust in God's promises, looking forward to the day when all things will be made new. The Spirit is with and is your Helper and Comforter throughout your life to strengthen and keep you in the Christian faith, to guard and guide you, to sanctify and help you grow in the one true faith. This is Jesus' promise to you. This is your hope. The empty tomb is your proof. Jesus is your confidence. (cf: Hebrews 10:19)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.