

Jubilate Sermon
April 17, 2016
John 16:16-23
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“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.”

“I don't need religion to be happy.” I was doing the final walk through with the manager of the apartment complex in Regina, Saskatchewan. It was my last day in the city after a yearlong vicarage and I had spent the day packing and cleaning. I was tired, but I managed to make small talk with the lady before handing in my keys for the final time. After explaining to her that I was going back to my final year of seminary she said, “I'm an atheist. I don't need religion to be happy.”

I didn't know religion made people happy. Perhaps its my cynical world view or perhaps its Jesus' words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.”

Jesus said these words to his disciples. You know why they would weep and lament. “A little while, and you will see me no longer and again a little while, and you will see me.” Just a few short hours after saying these words, Jesus was taken away. His disciples ran away lamenting. Peter, who followed at a distance departed weeping in great sorrow, because he denied his Lord when asked by a young girl if he was his disciple. Jesus was beaten, crucified, and buried out of the sight of his disciples. They saw him no more.

Yet a little while later, that is three days, they did see him. Their sorrow was turned to joy as they beheld their risen Lord.

Of course we know that Christ did not remain with them. He had to ascend to his Father. He could not remain with them in his glorified state, but he sent these disciples to proclaim the good news of his death and resurrection, so that all who believe may share in the disciples' joy. Soon after Christ's ascension, which we will celebrate in a couple weeks, his disciples again experienced sorrow. Peter was arrested. James was put to death by the sword. And wherever the Gospel spread, so did this sorrow and

lamenting.

And so today, we Christians can expect such lamenting, such sorrow, and yes, tears. And why can we expect such *unhappiness*? Well, certainly Christians endure persecution. It's not recorded well in our news media, but Christian news sources around the world constantly report of beatings, destruction of property, kidnappings, and murders inflicted on Christians by hostile groups and individuals. Yet, even closer to home, our children are intimidated if they stand up for God's Word. Fear of laughter or looking stupid silences confessions of Christ every day. And I don't need to be a prophet to predict the coming persecution of Christians in our beloved land of the free.

Yet, even if we suffer for the name of Christ, that would not be need for lamenting. As St. Peter writes, "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." (1 Peter 2:19-20) But it isn't the suffering for Christ that makes us weep, is it?

This is the struggle that affects every Christian. Sin. You can't escape it, can you? You hear the absolution from the pastor as from Christ himself. The pastor proclaims Christ's salvation for your soul. You reply, "Amen" to the words, "Depart in peace. Your sins are forgiven" as the taste of the bread and wine, Christ's true body and blood, remains on your tongue. You sing with joy hymns of praise to your God confident that saints in heaven surrounded by choirs of angels join you in praising the same God. You confess your readiness to depart the world in peace and you hear the Lord's benediction. Leaving the church building your spirit is renewed, you even *feel* sanctified, and yet, just a few hours later you fall into temptation. I don't know what it is, but you do. Perhaps the same sin you brought before God during the silent moment of reflection before confessing your sins in the Service creeps into your heart again. You were certain you were done with it as you gladly heard your sins forgiven.

This is the greatest sorrow of the Christian. You desire to be with your risen Lord. You desire to be free from sin in heaven, to please your Savior, to live as a child of God, yet you disobey. Your Old

Adam out muscles your New Man regularly. You don't want to sin anymore. You want to be with Jesus. Yet, for a little while you don't see him.

Of course the Christian will experience joy. Our Lord says, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." *Your* sorrow will turn to joy. *You* will pass from this veil of tears to paradise in heaven. Perhaps that's why my atheist friend thought Christians are happy. We just sit and smile about our eternal days drinking lemonade in the sun with a cool breeze. Well it certainly is true that we will have this joy. Heaven is real. We will go there by the grace of God. There we will no longer cry or be sad, hunger or thirst, the sun won't even harm us. Christ our Shepherd will shelter us and be with us forever. O how blessed we are to know this. We suffer now, but we will have joy.

When each of our children were born I tried to comfort my wife by telling her, "*In a little while* we're going to meet our baby!" Now, while she might have given me a polite smile, because she is so nice, she was in pain. She couldn't forget her pain yet. And so our Lord tells us it is with us. We don't know that joy now. When we do, we will forget whatever suffering we endure today. Are you mocked for your faith? You won't remember it. Do your sins cause you anguish? They will trouble you no more. Have people sinned against you and caused emotional scars deep in your soul? Your healing will be complete. Yes, you will have joy, even as the mother holds her newborn child in her arms.

Yet, now you must endure the labor pains. Joy will come later. And yet, in the midst of labor, it seems we do rejoice. Indeed we do. Even as we sojourn as exiles through this sinful world, our flesh waging war against our souls, we do rejoice. How can this be? How can we be happy? Christ our Lord says to his disciples, "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

We have joy now, because we have reconciliation with God our Father even today. Reconciliation, that is, our relationship with God was damaged, but now it is repaired. Sin, disobedience, hatred, it separated us and earned us death and hell. Those who do not know how serious sin is won't

understand how remarkable it is that we now have reconciliation with God. Without reconciliation, we would have no joy today, tomorrow, or ever. But Christ, in that little while away from the sight of his disciples earned that reconciliation. Christ Jesus, although he was true God even as he is today, did not display his divinity. He humbled himself. He suffered for all your sins. Even the sins you commit on Sunday afternoon. Jesus took everything that makes God unreachable and wiped it away with his divine blood.

And today, although Jesus for a little while is out of our sight, he stands before God the Father mediating for you. For a little while you don't see him, but God the Father sees him, he sees his nail printed hands, his pierced side, but he doesn't see your sins. And as surely as Christ stands before the Father proclaiming to him that your sins are forgiven, so you have the privilege, the *joy* to ask God anything, knowing that he will give it to you, even eternal life.

I don't need religion to be happy. But I do need Jesus. Without him, I have no joy. Yet, with Christ seated at the Father's right hand, I can have joy even today. I know that my Father's ear is inclined to me for the sake of those hands and side. I know that the forgiveness spoken to me is from God himself. With joy, even in the midst of labor, I eat and drink Christ's true body and blood, a token of peace from God himself. So today I have joy, although tomorrow I may sorrow a bit, but even then I can hope in the eternal joy waiting for me in heaven. So dear Christian brothers and sisters, be joyful. By the grace of God and through Christ's death and resurrection, you can be joyful even in the midst of sorrow. And your sorrow will pass and give way to joy forever.

Let us pray.

Lord, how shall I thank Thee rightly? I acknowledge that by Thee I am saved eternally.

Let me not forget it lightly, But to thee at all times cleave And my heart true peace receive. Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness, Christ has done away with sadness! Hence, all sorrow and repining, for the Sun of Grace is shining!

Amen.