

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

John 16:16-22

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH...YOUR GRIEF WILL TURN TO JOY

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Alleluia! Boy that feels good! Alleluia! You really miss saying that during the Lenten season. It is a powerful word that expresses our joy as God's people. This is the most important day of the year for the Christian Church. This is our Super Bowl. We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. If he did not rise, we would have nothing. But if he did, we would have everything. And he did rise! Are you singing Alleluias yet? How about the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah? That gets your blood pumping!

I wish that every day was Easter or that every day was like Easter, but we know that is not the case. Our Lord Jesus knew that as well. He spoke the words of our text as he was going out to the Garden of Gethsemane. He would suffer and he would die. He told his disciples, "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve..." Isn't that exactly what the mood of the first Easter Sunday was? Jesus' enemies were ecstatic. They had killed him. He was certifiably dead. One of Jesus' own disciples made it possible by being willing to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. They would have given him much more than that if he had wanted it. The Romans didn't have to worry about a threat to their empire.

The women were crushed by Jesus' death. Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalene and others had stood by the foot of the cross and watched him die. He died triumphantly, but he still died. His body wasn't even given a decent burial. They walked to the tomb, crying and hoping that they could anoint his body with spices. Peter had been the leader of the apostles. Some leader! When the going got tough Peter broke down and denied his Lord three times that evening when a little servant girl simply asked, "Didn't I see him with you?" There were tears, tears and more tears. And understandably so!

Why do the Scriptures share such raw emotions? Because that's reality! There are people out there who act as though the Christians celebrate "the victorious life" every day with a great big smile on their faces, no matter what happens. It isn't like that. Read the Scriptures. Study the great heroes of faith. They struggled and so do we. Christians hurt. We weep with sadness. We mourn over losses. We grieve over guilt. I woke up this morning singing our first hymn, "Awake my heart with gladness!" But I surely didn't wake up every morning in the last year singing it and I'm sure that I won't be singing it every day until next year. I wish that were the case, but I have to be honest.

I know that going to church this morning was very difficult for some of you. That is exactly what Satan wants. He brought sin and death into the world and he loves that. He wants us crying uncontrollably. What caused your tears this past year? Was it a feeling of failure, a loss of a job, a broken relationship that can't be repaired? Are you grieving the death of someone near and dear to you? A parent, a child, a spouse, a close friend? Are you troubled by guilt over something that happened long ago or even recently? Maybe it's public, maybe it's hidden, but for how long? When you think about your sins, do they trouble you so much that you wonder how a Christian could even think such horrible thoughts? How will you deal with such things?

Just before Jesus told his disciples that they would weep, mourn and grieve, he told them, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." In fact if we look at our text we will see that phrase

“a little while” seven times in three verses. They must be pretty important. Jesus tells us to step back and see the big picture. Things will look very rough at times, very difficult. We wonder if we will ever make it through it. But things will change. They will get better.

Sometimes when people tell us things like that, we just want to slap them. We want to feel sorry for ourselves. That person doesn't know what he or she is talking about. But it is different when Jesus says it. Jesus is the very Son of God. He is omniscient. He knows everything. He knows exactly how long our “little whiles” are going to be. For the apostles, he knew what was going to happen. They were all going to run away in the Garden of Gethsemane. John and Peter followed to the palace of the High Priest and we all know that Peter would have been better off simply running away. But Jesus also knew that he would be with them on that Sunday evening. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus simply would pass through them and announce, “Peace be with you!” He showed them his hands and his side. He let them touch the wounds of love that he had suffered while on the cross. He was the same Jesus that had been with them in the Upper Room. He was the same Jesus who had spoken about “a little while.” Perhaps those three days seemed like an eternity. I'm sure that they were for the apostles, yet that sorrow would quickly be replaced by joy as they saw the risen Christ.

And the same Jesus promises to be with us during our “little whiles.” He knows how long we will suffer with our illness. He knows how long we will deal with the strain of financial problems. He knows how long our hearts will ache with the passing of a loved one. He promises that we will not suffer beyond what we can bear.

Jesus is not merely omniscient, but he is eternal. That puts a lot of things in perspective. We have a number of members who are over 80 years old. You have seen a lot of things. You also have some perspective on time. It just keeps going faster and faster, doesn't it? You remember how long it seemed to take until Christmas or your birthday. It doesn't take that long any more, does it? Maybe that last month of high school dragged on until graduation. Today you look back and see how fast your children and grandchildren grew up. Jesus has an eternal perspective. He knows that our troubles in this world are light and momentary compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

We deal with some absolutely horrible things as we live in this world of sin. There are times that I watch the news or read the papers and I start crying. There are many good things in this world that we enjoy and yet we see horrible evil all around us. There is something better awaiting us and Jesus has made it possible. “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.”

Our grief will turn to joy. What wonderful words those are. Easter always comes after Good Friday. There are many people who don't want to commemorate Good Friday. They want to go straight to Easter. You can't have a resurrection without a death. A resurrection without a death doesn't mean anything. Easter takes a sad, seemingly hopeless situation and turns it to joy. The disciples were overwhelmed with grief when Jesus died. They mourned and grieved, but they would see him again.

Jesus had to die. He had to pay for our sin: your sin, my sin, the sin of the world. We could not do it. We could not keep the Law perfectly as God demanded. We could not rid ourselves of the sin that clung to every thought, word and deed in our body of sin. We needed Good Friday. We needed God the Father to punish his Son for our sin. We needed Jesus to stay on the cross until it was finished and every sin was paid for in full. We needed Jesus to bow his head and die. We needed him to be buried and we needed him to rise from the grave.

Easter is our guarantee that God accepted the sacrifice of his Son for the sin of the world. There is nothing more that needs to be done. Jesus took care of everything, once and for all. He is exactly who he claimed to be. Either Jesus

is the very Son of God who conquered death or he isn't. It's one or the other. If he is not who he claimed to be, we have nothing. We still have the problem of sin. We are liars following the greatest liar of all. We have no hope whatsoever. Those who followed Jesus have nothing to live for, in life or in death.

But if Jesus rose from the dead as he claimed, then we have everything. We have hope. We have peace. We have love. We have faith. Remember that Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection. We don't speak of the spirit of Christ living on. If we just close our eyes and think of him, he'll never really be dead. No, Jesus appeared a minimum of eleven times that the Scriptures record. There may have been many more that the Scriptures do not record. I think that we can be fairly sure that Jesus appeared to his mother Mary. Over 500 people saw him, heard him, touched him.

Easter tells us that we don't have to be afraid. We may cry for a little while but our tears of sorrow will be turned to tears of joy. We too will rise from the dead. It is never easy to lose a loved one. Our hearts break as we think of the difference these people have made in our lives and the joy they brought us. But we will be reunited with them. We will spend eternity with them in heaven, a place so wonderful that we cannot adequately describe it. It is a place where there is no more pain, sorrow, mourning or death. It is a place where the old order of things will have passed away. We will not be disappointed. As we take our last earthly breath, we simply fall asleep and the angels carry our souls to heaven to await the joyful resurrection of our glorious bodies on the Last Day. Yes, our grief is turned to joy.

Easter changes everything. As long as we live in this world we will deal with pain and grief, but this will last only a little while. We will spend eternity with our risen Lord Jesus. Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Alleluia! AMEN.