

5th Sunday of Easter

Text: John 16:12 - 22 (NIV)

¹²“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. ¹⁶“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” ¹⁷Some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” ¹⁸They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.” ¹⁹Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’?” ²⁰I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²²So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Theme: A Joy that No One Can Take Away

I had a great time at our annual youth retreat last weekend. The weather cooperated. We didn’t have any rain on Saturday. It was so nice that a couple of kids even tested the water. Some of them were very successful in fishing. We made a nice bonfire and ate smores. We had some good Bible studies. Saturday night it got to be 2:00 before I even noticed it. This was a great group of kids with one big exception. We had a big ping pong tournament, and I made it into the semifinals against our lay ministry intern Luke, but it was then that they all turned against me. They booed me, made signs supporting Luke, and even had a mascot for him. But none of that was going to deter my joy. I got the first four points. It looked like an easy win against an opponent who doesn’t even know how to hold the paddle, but in the end Luke won. However, even that loss could not take away my joy last weekend. I still look back at the weekend with a lot of fondness.

There are many things and even people who try to take away our joy as Christians, but as we hear from our Lord today, He gives us a joy that no one can take away.

I. Our Christian joy does not come easy.

Jesus compares it to birth pains. A mother has great joy when she holds a newborn baby in her arms. But that joy doesn’t come easy. It is preceded by nine months of pregnancy and then labor, which I have been told can be a little unpleasant. It is not easy to give birth to a child, but when that child is born, all that you went through it worth it. That child becomes one of the most precious things in your life. The pain gives way to great joy.

The disciples also went through a time of grief before they had their Easter joy. Jesus told them, “*You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.*” When I lost the ping pong match, the kids cheered. The kids rushed Luke to

congratulate him, but I was left alone in the agony of defeat. That's how it was for Jesus' disciples after He was arrested and crucified. His enemies cried out for His crucifixion, and as He was hanging on the cross, He was mocked and vilified. Our Lord's disciples left the crucifixion weeping and mourning. They locked themselves behind closed doors out of fear. Things seemed hopeless until Jesus suddenly appeared to them with the words, "*Peace be with you.*" They were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Just like at the birth of a child, their distress suddenly turned into great joy. Their Savior, who was dead, was now alive again.

Our Christian joy always comes through such cross bearing. Have you ever prayed that God would strengthen your faith? Did you ever notice that He doesn't strengthen our faith through something easy, but through a cross? We have a time when our faith is tested to its limits, just as the disciple's faith was. But the experience is something that we never forget our entire lives. It might be the Lord's forgiveness for something that we did. It might be His help in a way that we never expected. It could be the peace that passes all understanding. When God gives us the peace and joy that Christ came to bring to our lives, we soon forget the cross that we bore and focus on God's great love for us in Christ.

II. But still there are many things that try to rob us of that joy.

It is that way in Jesus' example of childbirth. You are so happy when the child is born, but every moment of that child's life is not a delight. When you come home, you don't get a good night's sleep for another 6 months. It is sometimes a challenge to get them to eat. There are diapers to change, potty training, terrible two's, then homework, driving, and many other challenges. There are many things that try to rob us of that initial joy when we first saw our child.

It would be that way for the disciples too. On Pentecost Day Peter preached a sermon in which 3,000 people came to faith. The congregation in Jerusalem lived at peace with each other, they cared for each other, and they continued to grow. But then after Peter and John healed a man, they were arrested and threatened to not preach in Jesus' name anymore. They continued to heal people and preach the Gospel, and they were arrested again. A short time later Stephen was stoned, and the congregation in Jerusalem was scattered. A man named Saul began going from house to house and dragged off Christian men and women and put them in prison.

There are many things that also try to rob us of our Christian joy today. Sometimes we are mocked because of our faith. We are sometimes persecuted. There are many people who despise us because of our connection with Christ. Just because we are Christians, it doesn't mean that temptation stops calling. In fact, it often seems as though the temptations increase. The devil tries as hard as he can to get us to fall into temptation. We have times of suffering and grief. There are crosses that we bear. It sometimes gets to the point, that we wonder how we can go on. We sometimes want to complain to God. We wonder where He is and why He doesn't seem to be answering our prayers.

III. But Christ promises that no one can take away our joy.

It was that way for the disciples. Jesus gave them a promise, the Holy Spirit. He says that the Spirit will tell them what is yet to come. He would remind them of the victory that was theirs in Jesus Christ. He would remind them that Christ redeemed them on the cross; He rose from the dead as

their Savior; He claimed them as His own in Holy Baptism; He ascended to the right hand of the Father where He rules all things for the good of His people; and He will come again to bring His people to be with Him in His glory forever. The Holy Spirit would remind them of the words that Jesus told them. Those words would give them peace and joy in any circumstance. After Peter and John were released from prison the first time, they didn't pray that they would be free from persecution. The church prayed that they would speak the word of God boldly. After they were flogged after their second imprisonment, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus.] Even after the congregation was scattered, they didn't despair, they continued to preach the Gospel wherever they went, and there was great joy. (Acts 8:8) Many people tried as hard as they could to take away the apostles' joy in Christ, but as they clung to Christ, there was no one who could take their joy.

No one will ever be able to take your joy in Christ either. We have that very same Spirit that they were given. In His hymn, "If God Himself Be for Me" Paul Gerhardt speaks of that peace that the Holy Spirit gives in this verse,

**To mine His Spirit speaketh Sweet words of holy cheer,
How God to him that seeketh For rest is always near
And how He hath erected A city fair and new,
Where all that faith expected We evermore shall view.**

That is exactly the point of our text. Through the Word and our Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit reminds us of our victory in Christ. He reminds us of our inheritance, which is sure because of the resurrection of Jesus. He reminds us of God's great love in Christ. In the times when we are too weak to pray, He intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. When we remember that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love in Christ, it fills our hearts with joy, even in the most troubling days of life. The Spirit reminds us that if God is for us, who can be against us. God has proven His love in the gift of His Son. We can go through life confident that God is our Father and Christ is our Savior. That faith in Christ gives us an inexpressible joy in any situation in life.

That is what we just sang about a few minutes ago, "Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near with His cheer; Never will He leave me....From God's joy can nothing sever, For I am His dear lamb, He, my Shepherd ever." When we remember that Christ is our Savior, there is no one who can take our joy from us. Our Savior gives us His joy because we are confident of His love. Amen.

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