Sermon | Easter 5C

TEXT: John 16:16—22

24 April 2016

“Joyful No Matter What!”

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen*

Dear friends in Christ—and especially our visitors here today, our preschoolers and their families:

what a joy, and delight to have you with us, to worship with us, hear God’s Word with us, at the end of the service, to listen to the preschoolers as they share their music with us—we’re glad to have you here.

Here at Zion, we have a tradition throughout the Easter season, where I the pastor, greet you the congregation with the words, “Christ is risen,” and you, the people come back at me with the response, “He is risen indeed. Alleluia.” So let’s try that…

The text we want to consider this morning is the Gospel from John 16, where Jesus says,

“*A little while, and you will see me no longer, and your hearts will be sorrowful.*

*And again, a little while, and you will see me, [and] your sorrow will turn into joy*.”

What does Jesus mean by these words?

I.

We know one of the hardest times in a preschooler’s life, is right there at the beginning of the school year, being dropped off at school. We have about a two week period at the beginning of the year where the hallway sounds a little like a dungeon, filled with no shortage of weeping, mourning, gnashing of teeth. Mrs. Julie assures us, “This too shall pass. They’ll get over it.” And they always do.

But why? Why is it so hard to be dropped off at school? Here’s my theory. I think it’s because they think they’re never going to see you again, that this is the last time they’re going to see mommy or daddy. And so what do you do as a parent when your child starting to get worked up when you drop them off? You say, “Don’t worry honey. I’ll see you in a little while.” A little while.

And that’s exactly what Jesus is doing with his disciples. He’s telling them, “In a little while, I’ll be away from you. In a little while, you’re not going to see me. And then you’ll be sad, sorry. But look: in a little while, you’ll see me again. In a little while, I’ll come back to you, and then you will have joy, joy that no one will be able to take from you—when I come back in a little while, you’ll have joy no matter what.”

And so, what is this ‘little while’ that Jesus is talking about? It’s helpful to understand when Jesus said these things. You see, Jesus was saying all these things Maundy Thursday night. And what was Maundy Thursday? Maundy Thursday was the night Jesus was betrayed, arrested. Maundy Thursday was the night before Jesus was put on trial by Pontius Pilate, and sent to the cross. It was the night before he was crucified, died, and was buried. It was the night before his three-day rest in the tomb. And so this ‘little while’ was the three days Jesus would be separated from in death. And when the little while came, it was just as he said, his disciples were sorrowful.

But remember what he promised, “In a little while, you’ll see me again. In a little while, I’ll be back.” And that, we know, was Easter. Easter is the day when Jesus rises from the dead. Easter is the day when Jesus comes back to his disciples, shows them his hands and side, and says, “*Peace be with you*.” And the Bible says, they were glad when they saw the Lord. In other words, their sorrow turned into joy. And so, what we learn from this is, to be apart from Jesus means sorrow. But to be with Jesus is to have joy. And that true for you. And it’s true for me.

II.

And so joy is the topic for today. And I want to start off by asking you this question: what gives you joy? What are some of the things which bring you joy in your life?

I hope that for each of you, that’s a long list of things, right? I know, at the top of our lists, we’d probably find a lot of the same things: our children and grandchildren, our spouses—husbands and wives, our parents, our family. But there are so many other little things that bring us joy too. We take joy in our work, our school, (sometimes). We take joy in the weather, the fact that it’s getting so much nice in northern. Indiana, so that we can go outside, garden, and play. We take joy in a home-cooked meal—a grilled steak maybe; for you it might be something else. We take joy in a sunset, or a ballgame, or a bonfire—whatever it is that makes us smile, we rejoice in all of these things. And we recognize that all of these things are good gifts from the Lord, gifts the Lord gives to you for your joy and gladness, because he loves you, as your Father in heaven. And so, so many things in our lives bring us joy.

But here’s a bit of a different question: What is the source of your joy, the foundation of your joy? Where does your joy come from? Because here’s the danger: if our joy comes from the things of this life, then our joy can be taken away, because the things of this life can be taken away.

Let me explain it this way: let’s say, your joy comes from the Chicago Cubs. Your joy is determined by how well the Chicago Cubs do in any given year. Then I guess you haven’t been joyful since 1908. Or maybe you’re joyful around this time of the year, in April or May, but by September or October, you’re always sorrowful again. Because the success is always taken away.

And so again, if our joy comes from the things of this life, our joy can be taken away. Because the things of this life can be taken away. And that’s true of everything in this life, right? If joy comes from our health, our health can be taken away. If joy comes from whether or not we have a job, jobs can be taken away. If joy comes from whether or not we have friends, or money, or possessions, or a house and home—all these things can be taken away. If our joy comes these things, our joy can be taken away.

But where does our joy come from as Christians? We know that our joy doesn’t come from anything we have: our money, our possessions, our house, our home. We know that our joy doesn’t come from our circumstances: whether or not we’re healthy, or employed, or single, married, divorced, widowed. We know that our joy doesn’t come from our feelings, whether we are happy or sad, anxious or content, frustrated or satisfied. Our joy doesn’t come from any of these things.

As Christians, our joy comes from Jesus. Jesus alone is the source and the foundation of all joy. And what he’s done for us is the reason we have joy. And we know what Jesus has done for us, don’t we? That he died on the cross to pay for our sins, that he rose from the dead to destroy our death, and give us life. And because of that, because of what Jesus has done for us, we have forgiveness, and life, and salvation, and heaven, all by faith—that is, all by simply believing in him, these things are ours.

And do you the great thing about that? That’ll never be taken away! Our joy in Christ will never be taken away. Because what he gives to us will never be taken away—no matter what! And so, even if everything in our life turns upside down, and we lose all sorts of things that are important and dear to us—we lose our jobs, we lose our health, we lose our loved ones through broken relationships or death—even if all of the circumstances in our lives change, none of that can erase our joy. Because at the end of the day, we still have Jesus, and his promise of forgiveness, and his promise of life, and his promise that we are the children of God who can call on God in prayer, day or night, and his promise of heaven. And so, if Jesus is the source of our joy, we can be joyful no matter what!

III.

And that’s important to remember too. Because, in one sense, we’re just like Jesus’ disciples. Jesus’ disciples had their ‘little while’ to go through, their ‘little while’ of being without Jesus, their ‘little while’ of sadness and sorrow. And it’s the same for us. This present life—the life we’re living right now is our own ‘little while.’ For a little while, we don’t see Jesus, even though he is with us in his Word. And so for a little while, we walk by faith, and not by sight. For a little while, we experience the sorrow and sadness because we live in a fallen world, a world that is broken and diseased with sin and death.

But just remember what Jesus told his disciples: “*And again, a little while and you will see me. And your sorrow will turn into joy*.” And remember how their little while’ lasted only three days. After three-days in the tomb, Jesus came back to them just as he said, and their sorrow turned to joy.

And so it will be for us. The sorrows of this present life are only temporary. And after sorrow comes joy, the joy of a new creation. And we heard about that new creation in the first reading, Revelation. St. John was given a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and the first earth passed away. And there in God’s new creation, there will be no more sorrow, sadness, pain, suffering, death. John saw a As John says it, “[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, for the former things—all the ‘little whiles’ of this life—will have passed away.”

That’s in our future. And those who have joy in Christ now, will have joy in Christ forever when he comes again, to take us to that new creation which will never pass away. For now we have our own little whiles to deal with, our little whiles of sadness and sorrow and being apart from Christ. But soon, when Christ comes again, all our sorrows will turn to joy, and no one will be able to take that joy from you.

Christ is risen! [**He is risen indeed! Alleluia**!] Amen.