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4th Sunday of Easter
Text: John 16:16-22
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Un-Takeable, Unmistakeable Joy

“Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will become/turn into joy.... You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” These words of Jesus certainly seem easy enough to understand, right? I mean...you don’t have to look too far to see how this prophecy is **already** played out in everyday life. Weeping and lamenting while the world rejoices? **We’ve got that in spades!** Have you seen the news in the past 40 years? A good portion of our country actually, truly **rejoices** when abortion—the murder of God-given life—is funded and protected, and when pro-life/anti-abortion measures are struck down. If that doesn’t make you at least shed a tear, then you really don’t get it. A good portion of our country rejoices—even some folks who claim to be “good Christians”—when churches or businesses are sued into bankruptcy or forced to shut the doors simply because they won’t **celebrate, promote, and endorse** sinful perversion or false theology. These faithful ones choose not to capitulate and cave to popular [but FALSE and HERETICAL] sentiments and emotions, opting instead to faithfully stand firm in the Word of God, **and they pay for it...dearly**. They lament and weep and suffer and experience all kinds of sorrow while the world slanders them and silences them and murders them; while the world rejoices and does a little victory dance and mugs it up for the camera, all in the name of “tolerance” and “freedom” and “rights” and “intellectual/moral enlightenment and love.” It happens all the time.

And this doesn’t even take into account the more personal/individual weeping and lamenting that we all go through from time to time as we bear our crosses and run this race called “life” through this fallen and sinful world. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve come from the hospital or from a funeral or some other grief-laden setting, and I see other people laughing it up and going about their business, enjoying life, **completely oblivious** to the pain and suffering and sorrow that I’m feeling. It’s a hard and brutal fact of life that we all know well, but is still incredibly painful when you come face to face with it: ***The world still turns. Life goes on. Unless it affects them, nobody really cares. Nobody really notices.***

I remember my grandpa’s funeral. It was a sad day...obviously. The funeral happened to take place on a school day, which meant that the Lutheran school, just down the hall from the sanctuary, was in session and full of kids. I’ll never forget how the funeral service came to an end at the same time the little ones were out playing on the playground, which is a shared parking lot. Here we are trying to get grandpa loaded up into the hearse for that last ride out to the cemetery, and the cacophony of children laughing and screaming and enjoying games of

kickball and tag and foursquare was flooding the scene. It just didn't seem right. *I wasn't mad at the children.* It just didn't seem fair. EVERYONE should be mourning and solemn and somber. Everyone should be lamenting and weeping this loss...*but they weren't.* Not fifty yards away life was carrying on, the laughter of playing children, who were oblivious and ignorant to our pain and sorrow, was drowning out the weeping of the bereaved.

But...there's light at the end of that sorrowful tunnel, right? We who suffer and weep and lament know that it's going to be better...*some day*; some day when we see Jesus again face-to-face in all glory; someday when we leave this veil of tears behind; when we leave behind this cruel and indifferent world that ignorantly (and sometimes even maliciously) *laughs and rejoices at our sorrow*; someday when we finally enter into the heavenly glory that has already been prepared for us before the beginning of time. *Then* we'll rejoice, and no one will ever be able to take that joy from us. Our tears will *finally* be dried. No more weeping. No more sorrow. No more fear or doubt or pain or suffering. *Then* we'll finally have true joy—an absence of all sorrow—for the rest of eternity.

Now, as true as all of this is for us, *is this what Jesus was referring to when speaking these words?* “*You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*” Some of you will be surprised, and some of you will even flat-out disagree, but the fact of the matter is that Jesus was **NOT** referring to the time we're in now; the time that would follow after His ascension into heaven but before His Judgment Day return. I know that sounds strange, but it's true.

How can I say such a thing? Easy. If you just consider the *context* of when Jesus spoke these words, such a statement falls nicely and neatly into place. In fact, it's when you pluck these words out of their original context that you get into *trouble*, and—yes—ascribing these words to some sort of post-ascension prophecy of how things will be here on earth between the time that Jesus ascends and when He returns again in all glory on Judgment Day **is plucking them out of context.** Such a false hermeneutic can and does lead to a lot of trouble.

First and foremost, these words of Christ are part of the teaching Jesus did at the Last Supper Seder meal. Let that sink in for a moment. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on *Maundy Thursday evening*, maybe less than one hour before the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. These words were spoken to men who, in just a couple of hours, would see their Lord taken away from them by a wicked, angry mob. They would see their Lord be beaten, scourged, and treated like an absolute lowest dreg of society. In just a few hours they would see their Lord brutalized and nailed to a crude and nasty Gentile instrument of capital punishment, *the very epitome of what it means to be utterly and completely cursed by God Himself.* A few hours after that, the whole world would go dark;

darker than midnight. Even the heavenly Father would turn His back on Jesus. After that, Jesus' dead body is taken down from the cross and sealed up in a dark tomb, swallowed up by the very earth itself. That's it. ***And the world rejoiced.*** The Sanhedrin, in particular, rejoiced. This "blasphemer," who was bad for business, and who stood to ruin the good thing they had going, was now ***gone and out of the picture.*** Scripture tells us that they even stood at the foot of the cross and mocked Jesus in celebration. "*He said He was the Christ. If you really are the Christ, prove it and come down off that cross!*" Oh, the wicked laughs they had at Jesus' expense.

But...that's not the end of the story, is it? These wicked men at the foot of the cross, the very men who put Jesus on that cross, representative of all Adam's fallen children (including us, by nature), didn't get the last laugh. Yes, the disciples were parted from Jesus for a short time; ***three days, to be exact.*** But...on that third day Jesus came to them. He came to them as they were hiding and cowering in fear behind locked doors. He came to them as they tried their best to be ***out of sight and out of mind.*** They didn't want to wind up on a cross of their own. Jesus comes into the midst of this doubt and despair and fear and unbelief. Jesus comes into the midst of this darkness and reveals ***His wounds, His Peace, His love, His joy...Himself.*** St. Luke tells us that upon seeing the resurrected Jesus and touching His wounds and hearing His proclamation of Life and Peace, the disciples "disbelieved for joy." "*A little while and you will not see Me, but a little while more and you will see Me. A little while and you will have sorrow while the world rejoices, but a little while later after that and you will have a joy and peace that no one can ever take from you.*" Guys: It doesn't get any clearer than this! Christ died and was buried...for a little while, which caused ***weeping, lamenting, and grief.*** But only three days later—truly a little while—and He was risen from the dead and standing in their midst...and they were full of joy!

And that's the whole point I want to focus you on today. Yes, we do still live in a veil of tears. Yes, we do bear crosses as we run our race of life through this dark and shadowy valley of death. Yes, we do still weep and lament, and the world continues to rejoice and mock and ridicule our faith and our suffering. ***But...we have something that even those first disciples didn't have; at least, not when these words were first spoken.*** We have a joy and a peace that no one can ever take from us...**right now.** We have the joy and the peace of the resurrected Jesus Christ, right here and right now. It's not a matter of "a little while" into an unknowable and unforeseen future, and ***then*** we'll get it. No! Christ is risen! Alleluia! **Jesus isn't gone. He's with us, now and always, just like He's promised.** "*Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body. This is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin.*" This is present-tense, objective joy; not someday in the future-tense joy that you may or may not feel, depending on your current, but ever-changing emotional state. ***This is Jesus, right here and right now. This is true joy and peace, whether you believe it or not.***

This is the objective, real-presence joy and peace that your Lord and Savior holds out to you right here and right now in Himself—His Word and His holy Sacraments.

So...I guess the only question really left for you, then, is *where are you looking for this very present, very real, very tangible and objective joy and peace?* That may seem like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised. Lots of folks are looking for peace and joy in their lives, and yet they're not looking for Jesus or to Jesus. And this includes Christians too. **Do not be deceived!** Good Christians look for peace and joy in their lives, and yet they often don't look where Jesus tells them to look. They don't look where Jesus promises to be, holding out His peace and joy that surpasses all understanding; a peace and joy that no one can ever take away.

What are you looking for? What are you listening to? **WHO** are you listening to? Is it the voice of the Good Shepherd you're hearing, or is it the siren song of the world, the devil, and your own sinful heart, calling to you and tickling your ears, your ego, and your emotions, all in the hopes of making a *shipwreck* of your faith? **Who are you listening to? Jesus? Are you sure? Test the spirits.** How does what you're hearing match up with God's Word, which is the sole source and norm for all faith and salvation? Are you being led to Christ's Holy Word of Scripture? Are you being led to Christ's sacraments? Are you being led into Christ's presence in His holy house...*or are you being pointed somewhere else...the bookstore, the yoga studio, the golf course, perhaps even your own heart?* Are you being offered something other than Scripture, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion, as if these means of God's grace and peace somehow aren't enough; as if there are other "equally-valid and effective" means of grace and peace? If your "guide" for peace and joy is not leading you here into Christ's presence; into His Word of Scripture; into His very presence at His own feast table to receive the real and tangible gift of Himself, **then you are being led astray.** That's not the Good Shepherd leading you. That's not the voice of the Good Shepherd you hear. And if that's the case, your Good Shepherd has already told you what to do: FLEE!

Folks: Are you seeking joy and peace? Here it is. Here **He** is, and He's right where He tells us to look. He's right where He's already promised to be—His Word and His Sacraments. No one can take this from you. Here is Christ. May this joy and peace of your resurrected, victorious, and ever-present Savior, which you will find nowhere else, *be truly all-sufficient for you*, now and always. May you be *ever-contented and over-flowing* in the peace and joy of Christ Jesus, which is your right now, and into all eternity.

AMEN