

Jubilate, 2006
 Text: John 16:16-22
 Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
 Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There was a day when Christians were led astray by the vigor of their spiritual exercises. There was a day when many Christians thought they could gather up brownie points with God with extreme fasting, or wearing itchy clothing, or spending years in the desert separated from friends and family. We don't do that any more. We've learned our lesson: God cannot be bribed with our invented works of piety.

But perhaps we have learned the lesson a little too well. For all their misguided zeal – at least those Christians were zealous not to be of this world. When Jesus says in our Gospel lesson today that when the world rejoices you shall mourn – does that ring true to your life? Do you feel, as St. Peter says in our Epistle, that you are a stranger and a pilgrim in this world with no home? Or are you in fact quite at home in and in tune with the world? Do the advertisers' slick and sexy commercials full of air-brushed and otherwise enhanced, mostly naked actors make you uncomfortable and feel out of place – or do you go on staring, feeling quite at home? Is your life marked by selfless giving to family, church, and the needy or by a relentless race for the new toy, clothes, car, or home improvement? Have you spent a fraction of the time and effort you spend preparing for a night out, or saving up for the next big purchase, on the things that really matter: prayer, being in the Word, preparing to receive the Sacrament, and teaching your children to live in the faith?

Repent. Wake up from your comfort and your at-home-ness with the world – you may think you are comfortable now, but remember the lesson of the the frog at rest in the water slowly brought to a boil. Look around you! This world is passing away – it will be here only a little while. This is why the more you chase after the things of this world the more you feel empty and betrayed. The more you let the world in the more it hollows you out like a worm in an apple. And you have known this hollowness. When the sickness strikes and death looms near all the toys and money mean nothing. They are empty shells, rotten on the inside and only appearing beautiful without. When another relationship is broken through betrayal, what do all the promotions and career advancements mean? When you realize that you do not even know your own children, how empty and bitter will all the hours at work be in your memory?

So turn away from the siren call of the world. Ignore what you see with your eyes and instead listen to Christ with the ears of faith. This world is not your friend. Even if

you try to make friends with it, it will betray you, use you, and leave you hollow and empty. Turn to Christ and find solid reality. Find that in Christ things are the other way round: instead of a shiny exterior with a rotten core, Jesus presents to you a hard road to walk, a difficult cross to bear, but with everlasting joy at the end and center of it.

For this is the Jesus way: the way of the cross. He himself left behind the use of his glory as the everlasting Son of the Father to take up human flesh. He himself endured the bitter hatred of a world so opposed to God that when it finally found him in the flesh it beat him, scourged him, placed a crown of thorns on him and nailed him to a tree. He did all this to purchase your salvation. He did all this out of love for you, so that you would not be lost in the world's delusions and lies of comfort. Look to Christ and learn the truth: this world is broken. There is nothing here to cling to. It will all disappoint, it will all disappear and fade away as the morning mist when Christ returns.

So cling to him. He is real Life. The life the world offers is artificial, an empty plastic shell. Jesus promises true life to those who cling to him in faith and walk his way of the cross through suffering and hardship. The world doesn't like this sort of talk. The world likes plastic people: the sort who always plaster a smile to their face and talk about steps to success and lifestyle gimmicks – everything, anything except hardship and bearing a cross. And this alluring promise of the world has even crept into the hearts of Christian people: one of the most recent best-selling books among Christians is titled *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living to Your Full Potential*. Beloved in the Lord, despite what TV preachers in expensive suits with artificially whitened teeth might say, there is no best life now, your full potential cannot be reached on this side of glory. A Christian's destiny is a cross of suffering in this life, and eternal joy in the resurrection of the dead.

And thus the Christian life is neither a flippant sitcom ignoring the significance of life and death nor a depressing Greek drama lacking joy and hope. The worst sort of unbelievers, as I spoke of above, go for that first solution, trying to laugh off life and whistling past the graveyard; the best pagans go for the latter view, resigned, dark, depressing. One of these better unbelievers once wrote “In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all. And to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned ever to expect it.” [Abraham Lincoln] That's close to the Kingdom of God but not quite it. There is much sorrow in the world. The whistling-past-the-graveyard solutions to these sorrows are empty and only lead to more sorrows and more depression and more hollowness. But neither is despair the answer. Never despair dear Christian: For Christ has overcome the world.

Behold what he says to you in the Gospel lesson today. He says it will be a little while in which the world will rejoice and you will have sorrow – but in a little while your sorrow will turn to joy. If your road now seems so long, if your hardship now seems too much, if your heart feels as though it will never mend, if your faith feels like it is crumbling: listen to Jesus. In a little while this will pass away. In a little while he will bring you his resurrection victory. So learn from Jesus the patience of Christian

endurance. Learn that your hope is in Him alone. Learn to offer up all your sufferings to Christ as sacrifices of praise and glory.

All that is to say: learn from Christ to Shout for Joy in the midst of this broken world. That is the lesson of today's Divine Service. Amidst these difficult words of Jesus and St. Peter about the harshness of the world and the Christian struggle in this life, the Introit and the Gospel Verse tell us to shout for joy. They do not tell us to plaster on a plastic smile and just be happy – that is another thing. Being happy comes and goes. Some days I'm happy with my children – when they pick up their toys and treat each other well; and some days I'm unhappy with them as they annoy me with their ill-behavior. But I always rejoice in them. Joy runs deeper than happiness. Joy knows how to frown and cry. It is not fleeting. Our Joy is Christ. He is the Rock and Foundation on which we stand. So long as we have him, we have the promise of eternal life, of a happy ending at the finish of a hard-fought struggle.

As Jesus himself says, it like a woman in labor: for that time all is pain and sorrow caused by the curse of the Law – for recall that Eve's pain in childbearing was the result of her fall into sin. So likewise with the whole Christian life, this world is broken and cursed due to the transgression of the Law and so is now full of hardship and pain. But like a woman in child labor we struggle toward a joyous goal. When this goal is reached, when we can look at our lives from the other side of them, then we shall see the labor and the struggle transformed by the grace and joy of Christ.

So dear Christian, in your struggles and hardships, in bearing your crosses, and learning to repent with eyes toward Christ, you have this sure hope of eternal joy. And what is more, you even have a foretaste of his kingdom. For he has not left you as orphans. He has not abandoned you to your own spiritual resources. No. He comes to you again and again and even today as he will feed you with his very Self, as he pours into you the Body and Blood that were broken and shed in his great struggle against the world. This Sacrament of the Altar is the sustenance and nourishment for the soldiers of the cross, for those who labor against the world and long for the world to come. It is the salvation of Christians and brings life everlasting. If you feel beaten up by the world; if you feel hemmed in on every side by suffering; if you sense your brokenness and know you need healing: come receive your loving Lord. Let him who has overcome the world fill you with his life – and you shall overcome it too, and your sorrow will turn to joy.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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