

Jubilate (The Fourth Sunday of Easter)
21 April 2024
John 16:16-22

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Gospel Lesson appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. John, the sixteenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

“A little while” doesn't always seem like a “little while.” Jesus used this one Greek word (which we have to translate as two words) to explain the period between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. But it also applies to other “little whiles” in the Christian life. Indeed, the language of “a little while” is a call for patience.

Jesus is preparing the disciples—which includes us—for the “little while” between the cross and the tomb, as well as between the Lord's victory over sin, death, and the devil, and when we reap the benefit of His victory. For we too live in that “little while” between cross and resurrection, in which we still suffer the effects of the Fall, and of our own sinful nature.

“Truly, truly, I say to you,” says Jesus, “you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” Jesus compares the “little while” of suffering to a woman in labor—which at the time is almost insufferable. But once the baby is born, the mother's attention is no longer on herself and her pain. She is rejoicing. And the object of her rejoicing is her beloved. The object of her attention isn't her own pain, but rather her “joy” in someone else, that is, the child who “has been born into the world.”

The disciples of Jesus were suffering during and after the passion of Jesus: His shocking arrest, the spectacle of His trials, His scourging, His public humiliation, His seeming defeat by the leaders of Israel, His being crushed by the Emperor of Rome—who claimed the supremacy

of being “the son of a god,” His suffering on the cross, His death, His being hastily thrown into a borrowed tomb by order of the governor who had ordered His death, His lack of even a proper burial with the coming Sabbath day—a Sabbath that was not to be celebrated as a rest from the labors of this life, but rather with the intense suffering of it.

This is why Jesus prepared the disciples for this “little while.” It is the Greek word: “mikron.” Their suffering, though it seems to be a mega, is really just a micro. For what is the time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, dear friends, compared with eternity?

Jesus had told the disciples many times that He would be crucified and die, and that the “little while” would be short, as He would rise on the third day. And the way they counted days in those days meant the “little while” from Friday night to Saturday night. The “little while” was just the time from the end of the sixth day to the end of the seventh day. The “little while” is literally the period from the very end of the work week, to the end of the Sabbath. It is a New Week, which in this case, is a continuation of the Sabbath—a Sabbath which never ends. For on the Eighth Day, we work in a different kind of labor. We work in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We take our eternal Sabbath rest in Him.

This is why we can be patient, dear friends. We suffer now. We have literal pain in our bodies as we age, as we suffer sicknesses and the physical effects of the Fall. We suffer pain in our hearts and souls—the pain of the death of loved ones, the pain of disappointment, the pain of shattered dreams, the pain of the world’s contempt, the pain of regret, the pain of our enemies gloating over us. St. Peter wrote our epistle lesson while Christians were suffering the pain of persecutions, both from the Jews and from the Romans. And His advice is to carry on through the pain, unchanged by it, not to lash out with bitterness or to fall into despair. He tells us to “abstain from the passions of the flesh,” to realize that we are at war. We are stoically to

maintain “conduct” that is “honorable,” for the sake of the kingdom. Our attention is outward, not upon ourselves, much like the new mother whose gaze is upon her newborn, and not upon her own aches and pains or past agony.

Even though we suffer at the hands of the emperor—even those phonies who think they are themselves the sons of gods—we can be subject to them “for the Lord’s sake.” It’s not about us. It is about the kingdom. We win not by overthrowing the government, but by subverting it through our endurance. So, we can be subject to the emperors (even the ones who think they are divine) and the governors (even those who wash their hands of the blood of the innocent, and condemn even Jesus to death). Even in oppression, we “live as people who are free... as servants of God.” And so, we “honor the emperor,” but we do not fear him. Rather, we “fear God.”

The early Christians took St. Peter’s words to heart, submitting to the powers that be—even to the point of their death being entertainment in the arena. For they knew that their suffering was just for a “little while,” and it was for the sake of the kingdom. For the spectators had never seen anything like it: men, women, and children looking death in the face, and rejoicing, singing hymns. It caused many to want what the Christians had. You see, the reason the spectators enjoyed these blood-sports was their own suffering—suffering the effects of the Fall. In time, the empire and future emperors would themselves submit to the true Son of God.

We Christians can endure the suffering of every “little while,” for we know the truth of what is to come: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.”

And, dear brothers and sisters, because of this reality of the Lord’s endurance, we can also endure and be patient. The prophet continues, “He gives power to the faint, and to him who

has no might he increases strength.... They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

This is the secret to our patience in the “little while” of suffering, dear friends. We know how it ends. We know because it has been revealed to us in the Word of God. We love God’s Word, because it is Good News. Although we live under the cross, we also live in Easter.

And at the cross, our Lord used another single Greek word which we translate with several words: “It is finished.” This was a curious thing to say at the time. It is not a surrender. It is not an acknowledgment of being defeated. Rather it is a military term of victory. “Mission accomplished,” says Jesus. For “He has done it,” as we confess in Psalm 22, the same Psalm which our Lord recited from the cross.

So, dear brothers and sisters, “He has done it.” “It is finished.” We live patiently in this “little while” because we live in victory. We live in, with, and under the cross, because we live eternally in Easter. “He has done it.” “It is finished.” And you are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—
Amen

Sermon based on one by the Rev. Larry Beane