

Fourth Sunday of Easter – Jubilate, May 8, 2022

Readings: Lamentations 3: 22-33; 1 John 3: 1-3; John 16: 16-22

Those Who Wait on the Lord Shall Rejoice

The people of God are pilgrims and sojourners in this world, looking ahead to a destination yet to come (1 Peter 2:11–20). Though we are now children of God, the fullness of what we shall be has not yet been revealed (1 John 3:1–3). We are those who wait on the Lord. *“The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him”* (Lam. 3:25). Jesus tells us that the wait is just a little while. *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me”* (John 16:16). Though you must experience sorrow for a time, though you must live as strangers in a world that is at enmity with Christ, yet your sorrow will be turned to joy when He returns. *“But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength”* (Is. 40:31). The little while of weeping shall be replaced with an eternity of rejoicing in the presence of Christ the crucified and risen Savior. *“And no one will take your joy from you”* (John 16:22).

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We don't often get to read from the book of Lamentations. And in fact, I suspect that most of us probably try to avoid that book as much as possible, because Lamentations, quite frankly, does not sound that exciting. I mean, who wants to go through Lamentations? It's kind of sounds like, "Well, woe is me. How horrible is this?" And yet, look at what we have in this chapter. In the third chapter of Lamentations, *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness."* I bet you didn't know that's where that hymn title came from, from the book of Lamentations. "Great is Thy faithfulness." Imagine that. *"The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in Him."* This really does sound like the theme of the day. "Jubilate, the joy of the Lord. Shout for joy."

And yet, we are realistic. I'd love to say that all the life, in every moment that I've ever gone through, I have been enthusiastically joyful about my life. But I'd be lying if I said so. And I think that all of us, all of you would be in the same boat. Life is good when we focus upon the Lord, and it is a joy to remember our salvation. However, there are cares and concerns and trials of this world that weigh us down. There are individual problems that we face, struggles that we have, our health, our wellbeing, our relationships, our jobs, our finances, our living situation, our interpersonal relationships. There's all sorts of things that we struggle with. Some of them work out well sometimes and some of them are a trial and a burden. And then there's of course the geopolitical situation, the wars and rumors of wars, and the good government or not so good government that we have to deal with and everything else that goes along with this, plus the sin of this world, the temptations that come our way, the devil actively trying to draw us away from the Word of God and from our confidence and faith in Him. And then of course, the ultimate enemy, death. And the suffering that we might have to face in this world, and that he deals directly with this in Lamentations. *"Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him."* Now, this is talking about Lamentations. This is talking about the burden of life. But if you listen, this really, I think, is talking about Christ. *"Let him put his mouth in the dust that there may still be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults for the Lord will not cast off forever."* You think about that.

Christ suffered all that He did in silence. He didn't fight back. He didn't try to justify Himself and why this was an unjust act that they punished Him, that they beat Him and that they crucified Him. He accepted it all. And we realize He went through some agony. And I'm sure, I mean, His cry on the cross is the ultimate cry of lamentation. Psalm 22, *"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"* If that's not a cry of lamentation, there is nothing that is. He suffered all these insults, and yet why was He there?

Last week we talked about it wasn't the power of the Roman militia and the Roman Legion that kept Him on the cross. It wasn't the force of the iron nails that went through His wrists and His feet. It wasn't the ropes that tied Him and secured Him to the cross. If He didn't want to be there, there was no force on earth that was going to keep Him there. But He allowed Himself to be crucified. He allowed Himself to suffer more than any of us can possibly imagine.

Why? Because He was creating the opportunity for us to receive the compassion of God. The Lord will not cast off forever, but though He caused grief, He will have compassion. He caused grief upon His Son so that He might have compassion upon us. And so we thank God for His willingness to suffer. And just to be clear, the whipping and the scourging was bad, the nails in the wrists and the ankle was bad, the suffocation on the cross was bad, but that is nothing, nothing compared to the suffering of God the Father turning His back upon the Son. Think about this, the wages of sin is death, and Christ had the entire humanities' sins upon Himself. The death that He suffered was more profound and more deep than any of us can possibly imagine, because it was the death of God the Father turning His back, of being abandoned by God. That is what He suffered, so that He might have compassion on all of us.

And He says very clearly, Jesus, in the Gospel, that He's going to go away, and then He is going to come back. And then He is going to go away, come back. And everybody's trying to figure out, "What does He mean by going away and coming back?" I don't know why John repeated this so many times, but it really sticks in your mind. Jesus is going to go away. What? He's going to come back really soon. For a little while, He'll be gone, but in a little while, He'll return. Now, I don't know about you, but it's been about 2000 years. It seems a little bit more than just a little while, at least for my definition of things. But for God, it's a completely different perspective. For Him, a day is a thousand years, a thousand years is like a day. He doesn't experience time like we do. But even if He did, really the time that we have between when we will see Him, which we see in our baptisms and in the Lord supper, we see the presence of God, we hear the Word of God, and He is with us tangibly in water and bread and wine and His Word. So He comes to us and we see Him. Maybe not in His full glory, but we see Him. But in a little while, we will see Him again, because each and every one of us really only has 60, 70, 80 years or so before we get to see God, because remember, the promise that He gave to the thief on the cross, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise."

And so we face death, not with fear, not with trepidation, but with excitement and hope, because this is the day that we get to see our Lord in all of His glory, that we get to be with God for all eternity, that the sorrows and the trials and the tears of this world are gone, today, the day that we die. Because when a Christian dies, remember, it's not really death. It's just falling asleep. No Christian in the New Testament dies. Every Christian in the New Testament falls asleep. And what do you do when you fall asleep? You wake up the next day. And for us, that next day will be with God. And what a joy with thanksgiving and praise that we will have on that day. But in the meantime, we have to deal with the trials and the tribulations and the struggles of this world. And sometimes it feels overwhelming. I mean, let's face it. There are things that happen to us as individuals and things that happen to this world that are painful, that we don't want to face.

How do we deal with it? How do we stand in the joy and the hope of our salvation if we know that we're still going to suffer, if we're still going to have to go through the hardships of this life? We can do this because we know that we have been called the children of God. That our loving Father, as the Catechism says, wants us to call Him as dear Father, as dear children call their dear father, to think of Him as one who loves us and is with us and cares for us day by day. Most of us know the love of a father and mother, and we celebrate that. And it's often seen that the love of a mother is the deepest love that you can have here on earth. And that's probably true, because she has given birth to this child or adopted this child or brought this child into being, and there is a connection there that is as deep and abiding. But that's nothing, nothing compared to the depth of love that Christ has for all of us.

It cost Him His life and He gave it up willingly because He wanted us to know so badly that we are His children and that we can always trust Him and call upon Him, that He was willing to suffer all so that we would not. That is how we can stand firm. When our eyes begin to focus upon the trials and tribulations of this world, we get frightened, we get scared, we lament. But the beauty is we have the example of Jesus. Jesus, cried out "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" He did. It was the deepest lament you could ever find. But if you read Psalm 22, it does not end with lament. It ends with joy and thanksgiving that God has done it, and then He has proclaimed it to a world that does not know Him. And so we know, as Christians beloved by God, adopted by God, children of God, we know that anything that we suffer here in this is only temporary. It will not last, and we can find hope and confidence in this.

I remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right? They're facing the fiery furnace. Why? Because they refused to worship the false God that Darius had set up and they were going to worship God alone. And they're facing this fiery furnace is so hot that the guards who are going to throw them into the fiery furnace, they keel over from heat exhaustion and die themselves. And what do they say when they're facing their imminent death? "God will save us. Even if He doesn't, we'll still worship God."

And I love that confidence that God will save us. But even if He doesn't, He still is saving us. Because even if we lose our lives here, He still saves because He has purchased us and He has forgiven us our sins, and therefore we have eternal life. Even if this life is cut short, even if in this life we face the fiery furnace or the lion's den or the Circus Romano or whatever else it is that we face in our lives, God is with us and He will wipe every tear from our eye, and we will be at peace with Him. What a great and glorious day that will be. And so we can stand firm. We are children of God, beloved by the Father because we are His.

May that grace and that mercy and that peace and that love of God be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.