

This morning, let us begin with the lesson from St. John's Gospel, chapter 16. This is part of an extended dialog and teaching which John records for us after the Last Supper in chapter 13 of his gospel, and prior to Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane in chapter 18. So when Christ says, "A little while and you will not see me," this most directly refers to His crucifixion. But as we know, Christ's death was not a termination, it was a redemption. Christ, having died, was present with God the Father and then restored to a glorified bodily life on earth.

From the disciple's perspective that Saturday of Passion week, Christ's death was their own death, for the man in whom they had placed their hope had been killed. They did not understand the plan of God. And so they sorrowed deeply, deeply. They were devastated. Likewise His resurrection was their resurrection. When Jesus returned to them, the thick cloud of their grief was dispelled in a moment, their despair was replaced with immeasurable, no doubt overwhelming, joy. Their hopes had not been irrevocably dashed after all. In the presence of the resurrected Christ, meaning and purpose were restored where there had been none. Christ said to the disciples,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

In this statement is revealed a fundamental divide between the world and the church. When the Church suffers, the world systems rejoice, for they hate the God who saves His creation. The world and the evil powers behind it desire the death of humanity and the destruction of all that is of God. Love, Hope, Faith, Beauty, and Goodness are primary facets of Creation because they are reflections of God Himself. The powers and principalities that rebel against God are defined only as a reaction to God. Hate sets itself in opposition against Love. Unbelief against faith. Evil against Goodness. When we weep, the world rejoices.

However, when the Church lives into her calling, unbelief, hate, and evil flee. The gates of hell cannot withstand the onslaught of the people of God, led by the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Our godly worship, worship in spirit and in truth, leads us into joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

For us, the sorrow of the Apostles because of the crucifixion, to some extent, parallels our own sorrow and struggle in the world and against our own flesh. Yes, we too are in a somewhat similar state, for Christ is not bodily with us. Yet for a little while He is absent from us, ruling from the right hand of God in heaven. And since we are not with Christ, we are not yet at home. We haven't entered into that final rest, that eternal sabbath. St. Paul

begins the epistle lesson this morning noting that we are strangers and pilgrims. This world is not our home. Our home is with Jesus. It is with God, for we were created to be with Him, and we will not enter into our rest, we will not fully leave sorrow behind until with are with Him in our perfected nature as Christ has been perfected and is with God. For Christ has become the firstfruits, not the final fruits. So therefore we will eventually be glorified following Jesus to where He is.

Now we have a definite advantage over the first disciples right after Jesus died. First, we know the end of the story. We know that Christ rises from the grave to lead humanity into the redeemed life which culminates with our resurrection. Secondly, we have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The Spirit of God leads us deeper into Jesus, for He writes the very laws of God on our hearts and gives us strength to persevere in this world. The Holy Spirit leads us forth in building the Kingdom of God here and now, calling the world to repentance and to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the seal assuring us that we are very members incorporate in the family of God.

So we are in the world, but not of the world. We have been cut off from the family of Adam and grafted into the family of God. We are divided from the world. It is not our home, and as it is will never be our home. As we will be given perfected bodies, so the world that we live in will become a perfected creation, unstained by the sin of Adam, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, before the sin of mankind brought a curse upon us and upon creation which, “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” We live in the already, but not yet.

Does not this then leave us conflicted regarding how we shall live? Throughout history, there have been those sects who are convinced that Christ's return is imminent, and thus they sell all that they have and proceed to set up camp in the desert, waiting for His appearing. One must give them credit, that they are fully convinced of their beliefs; and their actions prove their conviction. Yet, except for Matthew 24, if it is interpreted in a certain way, I don't really see where these actions are commended by Holy Scripture. Again, we return to the questions, “How then shall we live?” What does it mean to be in the world, but not of the world? This world is not our home; we are pilgrims and strangers as St. Paul says; but in a sense this world is our home. So what do we do with that?

Well, these are the questions that St. Paul is addressing in the epistle lesson. First of all, we must note that our primary loyalty remains, as expected, to God. We are commanded to submit to Kings or their governors for the “sake of the Lord.” Also we participate in the world as “servants of God,” and in our conduct and conversation we are to “Fear God.” When we, as Christians, commit crimes or live in a careless, prideful, or selfish way, we bring reproach to the Church and thus to the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Being a Christian is not being part of an exclusive club that we should boast about as though not just anyone can get in. In fact, anyone can get in—thanks be to God!— and the more the better. We are not to do good works so that we can earn praise from the world; why should that be of concern to

us? Nor should these be a basis for condemning others, because but for the grace of God, there go I. No, our primary motivation for living commendable lives as Christians is to love Christ.

Giving our first loyalty to God also means that we are not anarchists. We do not reject the customs and laws of society out of hand as if they do not apply to us. We are to obey the laws and the cultural mores of the society in which we live while still maintaining our primary allegiance to the Lord God. Being a Christian does not mean that we make our own rules, but we overlay God's ethical laws on top of society's laws. In other words, we are to hold a higher standard for ourselves, neither excepting ourselves from, or embracing how, those around us live. What may be legal in a society, may not be helpful or even lawful for the Christian – the immediate example that comes to mind is marijuana use, which is legal in our state, but is destructive and so we do not participate in it. And there obviously may be occasions where society commands us to do that which is against the law of God. We must refuse to participate in those things that are contrary to our profession, and may actually suffer consequences for such actions. This has become more of a possibility even for us as the norms of Judeo-Christian sexual ethics have been systematically eroded in our country.

But still, in our society we are to go about the business of the kingdom. This sometimes means being involved in politics. It certainly means being involved, with discernment and wisdom, in spreading truth, and opposing lies and corruption and abuses of power. But mostly, the life of a Christian should be marked by honesty, chastity, conscientiousness, and civic responsibility. Let us understand that those who live this way will be noticed, though not generally praised, by the world. Those outside the Church are judged by the Church, both by the good behavior of her members and by her very existence. Those who are citizens of this world hold the citizens of the Kingdom of God in contempt. So let us not give them an excuse to criticize us or the faith we profess. Let them not disparage our Lord Jesus Christ because of what we do or how we live.

More than this though, we as Christians should not be hiding within our church walls like the disciples hid and locked the door for fear of the Jews. At that point they did not understand that the Resurrection had taken place. But we do understand. Christ is risen, and we therefore are responsible to display the joy and generosity of the life of Christ in our own conduct. Our concern isn't just to survive. Our concern is to build the Kingdom, and this is more than just bringing people into the Church. It means that we build businesses that operate honestly and provide excellent goods and services at fair prices. It means we build schools that honor the image of God in the student and teach them to serve God and their neighbor in love. It means that we grow good food to feed our communities. It means that we create beautiful and excellent art and support artists who reveal God's Truth in the world. It means that we encourage families and child bearing, for our children are our future. We raise them to be the solution to the problems we face and not victims of those problems. It

means creating a distinctly better life for all because of our devotion to Jesus who is the author of life.

These are the values and the vision that aligns our actions with the Kingdom of God. We are still called, like renewed Adams and Eves, to tend the Garden, multiplying and ruling in the earth with justice and peace, studying to understand God and His world more fully, nurturing lives of joy. The end of the epistle lesson from St. Paul reads, "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

This is how we call the world to Jesus. Not through programs, but through living fully in the love and joy of God. Not by riches, but by love. Not by power, but by peace. Not in oppression, but in freedom – the freedom of serving the one true God. The beauty of serving the One True God.

And in this parish, I want these ideas to be more than just high-sounding rhetoric. I want them embodied. Incarnated. Our limitation is not, as is usually believed, money or resources. Our God will supply all of our needs. Our limitation is people – people who have the vision to create something great that blesses the parish directly or indirectly. If you have an idea for a business or a project or a ministry that you want to start or lead, then talk to me. Let's come up with a plan to build something great. We cannot afford to be passive. We either grow in our service to our Lord Jesus or we slowly die. I prefer the former!

For now, we do not see Christ face to face, but still we have joy, for He is with us – even if we are misunderstood and maligned in this world, even if our lives seem undergirded, as it were, by a melancholy soundtrack. Christ said, "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." And so the hope of eternal bliss always is before us. It is this hope, of not just living with the Spirit of God, but of being in the very presence of God most fully, that is the root of our joy. Live it now, and you shall indeed live it for all eternity.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. AMEN.