

John 16:16–22  
Jubilate (Easter III)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
April 21, 2024

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Today is Jubilate Sunday. Jubilation! Shout for joy! Shout for joy to God, all the earth. Alleluia. Sing the glory of His name; give to Him glorious praise! Alleluia. We rejoice in the Resurrection of our LORD! We rejoice that Jesus Has overcome death and the grave. We rejoice that Satan is defeated and that the enemies of the LORD cower before Him. We proclaim to all: “Come and see what God has done: He is awesome in His deeds towards the children of man.” Come and see Jesus that you too might rejoice! That’s the joyous message of the Church proclaimed in all the world.

On this Jubilate Sunday and over the next few weeks leading up to the Ascension of our LORD and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we hear from the Upper Room discourse in the Gospel of John. That’s when Jesus prepared His disciples for the time He wouldn’t be with them in the same way. Jesus knew He would die, rise again from the dead, and then ascend into Heaven. He would still be with His Church. That’s what He says at the end of St. Matthew’s Gospel: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus would still be with His Church, but not in the same way He was with His Church when He walked the earth. Jesus is very much present with us today and everyday until He returns again in glory. And yet we don’t speak with Him face to face the way the disciples spoke to Him. We don’t see Him anymore the way they saw Him. And yet, with the eyes of faith, we behold our LORD even now as He comes to us in His Word and in His Sacraments as we gather together in His name.

Jesus said to the disciples in the Upper Room on the night He was betrayed: “A little while and you will see me no longer, and again a little while, and you will see me.” Obviously the disciples were confused by this statement. What on earth was Jesus talking about? The disciples said to one another: “What is this that He says to us?” We won’t see Him anymore because He’s going to the Father? And then in a little while we’ll see Him again? What does He mean by “a little while?” We don’t know what He’s talking about. Jesus answered before they could even ask the question: “What does this mean?” “A little while and you will see not see me, and again a little while and you will see me”?

Jesus’s answer goes like this: “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” Not to see Jesus brings with it weeping and lamentation, sorrow and distress. But to see Jesus brings with it joy. Jesus would be hidden from the disciples’ eyes. And so they would be sorrowful. The world would rejoice. Why? Because finally that troublemaker, Jesus, would be out of sight and out of mind. This happens first in Jesus’s death. There, Jesus was hidden from sight. It seemed as if He had gone away, laid into a tomb, which was then sealed with a large stone. Jesus was hidden from sight. But after three days He appeared again by rising from the dead. The disciples were sorrowful when their LORD died, but after three days, their joy returned when the LORD came to them again to visit them and eat with them. Those who killed our LORD rejoiced at His death, but at the Resurrection, their joy turned to sorrow and anger. The enemies of our LORD would stop at no lengths to stop this message from going out into the world. The world’s joy turned into sorrow and the sorrow of the disciples turned into joy.

But Jesus would go away again. That’s what He was preparing the disciples for in the Upper Room. After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus would walk this earth for another forty

days before He was taken up into Heaven. Jesus would again be removed from sight and the disciples would face trouble wherever they went. And yet Jesus would still be with them. He ascended into Heaven not to leave us nor forsake us, but to fill all things; to be present with His entire Church at all times and in all places in the Word and in the Sacraments. The disciples wouldn't see Jesus in the same way they saw Him during His earthly ministry. We don't see Jesus that way either. He talks to us in the preaching of His Word and we talk to Him in prayer, but that's not exactly the same thing as going on a road trip with our LORD or getting a coffee with Him. Jesus is still very much present with us, but in a different way than He was present before the Ascension.

The unbelieving world thinks Jesus is gone, that He's dead and buried and that dead people do not and cannot rise from the dead. They believe Jesus's seeming absence from this world to be an absolute absence. And the world rejoices over this absence. The world rejoices at Jesus's absence because the world hates Jesus without cause. Jesus is the prince of peace. He teaches us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Jesus teaches us to forgive others as we have been forgiven in Him. And yet people hate Jesus. They know that a Savior from sin implies the need for a savior and many people are too proud to admit they need Jesus. And so they end up hating Him. The light has come into the world. But many people hate the light because the light reveals their own shortcomings. When the light is turned on, the cockroaches scatter. When Jesus, the light of the world, is present, the powers of darkness must flee. Those who love the darkness avoid the light. They rejoice in their shame and they are sorrowful when their sin is revealed. The unbelieving world flees from the light and rejoices when it seems the light has gone out, when it seems that Jesus is no longer here.

The disciples would be sorrowful because Jesus had to go away. After He ascended into Heaven, Jesus would no longer be available to walk and talk with His disciples as He always had. It would seem as though He disappeared from this world. The world rejoices because it thinks Jesus is gone. But it's not true. Jesus is still with us in His Word and Sacraments. At times we might be sorrowful, thinking Jesus has abandoned us. A Christian might feel this way often. When things aren't going the way we think they should or when the turmoil of this world seems to be getting out of hand, it can seem as though Jesus isn't really in control of all things. It seems like He's absent. The world rejoices and the disciples of Jesus are sorrowful. But Jesus is in control. He still reminds us of that in His Word. The Lamb of God rules from His throne and He is with us always, even to the end of the age, and so we rejoice in the LORD always. This is the tension we face as Christians, the tension between sorrow and joy.

In a little while, our sorrow will turn to joy. What does Jesus mean by "a little while"? That's the disciples' question. "A little while" is relative. It's like saying "in a minute" or "just a moment." In a waiting room or on a help center call line, "a little while" can seem like a really long time. What does Jesus mean by "a little while"? First, He means three days. After three days, sorrow will be turned into joy. Death would be swallowed up in victory when our LORD rose from the dead. Then the sorrow of the disciples would turn to joy. But then Jesus ascended into Heaven. The disciples were filled with joy, knowing that Jesus is risen and would return again to judge the living and the dead. But there would also be much sorrow and much tribulation to face. That's been the life of the Church since Jesus ascended into Heaven, and that will be the life of the Church until Jesus returns: a life of sorrow and joy. So far, "a little while" has lasted roughly 2,000 years. Only God knows when that "little while" will turn into joy without end.

Jesus compares this “little while” to a woman giving birth. A mother has sorrow and anguish because her hour has come. A time of intense pain and tribulation must be overcome by the grace of God. But when she has delivered the baby, the mother no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Of course, women do remember the suffering and pain. But in the normal course of things the joy of a new child far outweighs the suffering that had to be endured. Once the mother beholds the face of her child, everything is different. After a little while, overwhelming suffering is turned into overwhelming joy.

“So also you have sorrow now,” Jesus says, “but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” You have sorrow because you don’t see Jesus. But know this: Jesus sees you. He knows your pain and your suffering. He knows everything you’re going through and He cares. He sees you even if you don’t see Him. And He still comes to you, not symbolically, not just in your imagination, but really and truly, right here and right now, in His Word and in His sacraments. Here you see in a mirror dimly, but then, when Jesus returns, you will see Him face to face. All your sorrow will turn into joy. Your hearts will rejoice, and nobody will take that joy from you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! We stand for the Offertory.