

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Fourth Sunday of Easter [Jubilate] (2021)**

**Jesus Is Endless Joy**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“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 . . . I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:20, 22b, ESV)***

For three years now Jesus has been with His apostles teaching them and preparing them for their heavenly calling to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in His name to the world. As part of His catechism, our Lord had on more than one occasion told the disciples, ***“the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.” (Matthew 20:18–19, ESV)*** Thus, throughout the time of His ministry, Golgotha was always on the horizon. But now it was just around the corner.

It is the night before His crucifixion and our Lord Jesus, and His disciples are gathered in that upper room to celebrate their last Feast of the Passover together. The meal has been eaten, the other activities and discussions have taken place and they are getting ready to depart for the Garden of Gethsemane when our Lord says to them, ***“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” (John 16:16, ESV)***

There was no hesitancy in our Lord’s voice. He spoke clearly and plainly. He is going to be separated from His apostles for a little while, but they will be reunited. Yet, when hearing these words, the apostles ask each other, ***“What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father . . . What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” (John 16:17-18, ESV)*** As they had on many other occasions, they did not understand what Jesus was saying!

Perhaps they did hear Him but chose not to understand what our Lord said. Because if Jesus was talking about what they thought He might be talking about, they didn’t want to hear it. Except for Judas, not one of them could bear the thought of Jesus leaving them. But, indeed, Jesus is bidding them adieu. He is telling them good-night and good-bye. I must leave you. Presently I am with you, but in a few short hours I shall be taken from you. Not only will I be arrested, but you will abandon Me, and I will be taken and tried in an unjust court, then I will be sent to stand before the Roman authorities, brutally beaten and scorned, crucified and buried, and a large stone will seal the tomb. You will see Me no more. That which I spoke to you before regarding my death, is now upon us. But fear not, for, ***“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.” (John 16:20, ESV)*** Therefore, do not lose heart for your sorrow will be brief and it will quickly turn to joy, because ***“I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:22, ESV)***

All these words of our Lord Jesus came to pass. The authorities arrested Him, tortured Him, crucified, and killed Him. The Jewish temple authorities had accomplished their goal. Rather than weep, these murderers rejoiced in the death of Jesus. Pilate, himself was relieved because

now the Jews couldn't say to Caesar that Pilate had sided with a man who wanted to be king of Judea. But in just three, short days, the joy of the Temple authorities would turn to fear. How could this be? Jesus has risen from the grave! When the guards, who had been placed at the tomb, notified the authorities saying Jesus had risen, they said to the guards, ***“Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.”*** So they took the money and did as they were directed.” (Matthew 28:13–15, ESV) Yes, our Lord Jesus had risen from the grave, alive and well, glorified, and resurrected. That evening, in His newly resurrected and glorified body, Jesus came to His apostles showing Himself, speaking to them, and giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. What joy! What inexpressible joy! Our Lord lives! He is alive! He has done what He said He would. Now, we know, there is nothing He cannot do, He is the Son of the Living God, proof positive that all He has said and done makes Him the Son of God.

The Christ, who had come from the Father to us, is now going from us back to the Father. His descent from heaven was necessary so that He could die, giving His life for the forgiveness of our sins, that in death He could victoriously descend into hell claiming His victory, and then, victoriously, He could ascend back into heaven to be by His Father's side. All this the apostles did not understand at this time. Truth is, neither would we have understood if the Holy Spirit had not opened our hearts and minds to the Word of God which reveals His Son and clarifies for us these very words. So, don't be too hard on the misunderstanding of the apostles.

Inexpressible Joy, this was the joy the apostles had the night of our Lord's resurrection. This type of Joy is rarely seen, but we, too, have experienced such joy. We did so the day our hearts and minds were opened by the Holy Spirit to receive the gift of faith, to know who Jesus is and what He has done for our salvation.

Just like the apostles who could not understand the words of Jesus, we were unable to understand our condition, our precarious position without Jesus. We lived with one foot on earth and the other in hell because we did not know the Lord. We were not counted among the sheep of our Lord's sheepfold. We were lost, wild sheep, freely roaming in the wilderness of sin, being forever shadowed, and chased by the great wolf, Satan. Our flesh was easily overcome by worldly temptations and the urgings of Satan. In our ignorance we were without fear, unaware of our pending disaster. But Jesus took pity on us and poured out His mercy upon us through the Holy Spirit, who opened our hearts and minds to our impending doom.

Accused by the severity of the Law, our hearts and minds were made aware of our sinful condition. Our conscience was awakened as we were brought to the realization that we were living in sin, hopelessly lost without Christ. Hopelessly wandering in a maze of sin unable to find the exit. Desiring to be rescued, we cried out to God to come to our aide, and He did. Out of His gracious-mercy God revealed to us His Son, Jesus Christ who gave His life, shedding His blood upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Then, to complete His rescue, God gave us the Holy Spirit who in turn gave us the gift of faith to believe in the atoning sacrifice our Jesus on Altar of the Cross.

By giving us the gift of faith to believe in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, God opened the maze we were in. His blessed gift of faith tore down the barriers to our understanding of God's great gift of redemption through His Son Jesus Christ. Enlightened and rescued, we could be nothing less than filled with inexpressible joy. Not our work, but God's work lifted us from the prison of death and opened the door of eternal salvation in heaven. What greater joy could there be than to be blessed by God with the gift of faith. There is no greater joy. To know *Jesus* and His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins is *Endless Joy*.

Filled with this joy we live everyday of our lives overwhelmed by what God has done for us through His Son Jesus. But all too often, we fail to remember the magnitude of this great gift, the elation of our joy. Too often, we fall back into sin. Oh, not that we want to, but we can't help ourselves, this is the flaw in our nature, corrupted since birth and remaining corrupt till death. In the blessed waters of Baptism, we know that original sin, that sin of our first parents which forever corrupted the nature of man, was cleansed. That is, it was not imputed to us. But the material portion of original sin remained. That which the church has always called, concupiscence. So great is its power that men obey their evil impulses more often than their sound judgment, thereby falling into sin. That is why our Lord Jesus told His apostles on that last evening in the garden of Gethsemane, ***“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41, ESV)***

More often than we want, the flesh overcomes our desire to obey the Spirit, and we fall into sin. In so doing we reject what God has given, we reject the will of the Spirit. Here we tetter on the edge of apostacy, but the Spirit does not give up so easily. In the midst of our sinful act, the Holy Spirit whispers to our conscience and reminds us who we are, children of God. Those called to be His own through the blessed waters of Baptism. If our depravity has not completely overwhelmed us, we hear the call of the Holy Spirit, calling us to repentance. Calling us to confess our sins and to penitently receive absolution. In deep remorse we lament our sinful deed and seek God's forgiveness, knowing that for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, He will forgive us.

Wow! Just think of it. Steeped in the throes of sin, our Lord calls us to repentance. Our first reaction is like that of the apostles when they learned of the death of Jesus, we are filled with sorrow, and grief that we have offended Almighty God. Filled with remorse, we fall to our knees and beg for forgiveness. We dread the possibility of having lost our Lord, that we will see Him no longer. We are filled with great sadness knowing that it is sin, just as we have committed, that caused the death of our Lord, our sin carried Him to the Altar of the Cross there to shed His blood for our forgiveness. How could we fall prey to sin? How could we engage in what God so violently detests? So violently does God detest sin that His wrath is poured out upon the unrepentant sinner, casting them into an eternal abode of torture, casting them in hell.

But having been brought to our senses by the indwelling Holy Spirit, having been led to repentance and confession, we are assured that for the sake of His only-begotten Son, God will forgive us, and we rejoice for we see Him again. We are filled with the same inexpressible joy that the apostles felt that night our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. We are reunited with our Lord *Jesus who is Endless Joy*.

Oh that every man, woman, and child on the face of this earth could know the joy we know. That God desires to make them all a child of His through the blessed waters of Baptism, where He forgives their sin, and gives them eternal life through faith in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus upon the Altar of the Cross.

Moreover, because the Lord has given you such joy, He calls on you to call the world to repentance. He calls you to go forth and proclaim the Gospel to your family, friends, and neighbors, and He calls you to support the efforts of your church in proclaiming the Gospel to the world that others may know the joy you know. So go forth from here and spread the inexpressible joy of believing in Jesus to others. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.