

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint John the sixteenth chapter beginning at the sixteenth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." 17 Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "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 go to the Father'?" 18 They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying." 19 Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you

will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?" 20 "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. 23 "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Having never been pregnant myself I can only agree with Jesus and His words. He tells us that though a woman has much pain in labor once the child is born she forgets all of that pain. While carrying a child for nine months the aches and pains mount, once the child is born her pain is forgotten and love flows forth. While suffering through the labor and pushing and everything else, once the child is born relief is shown on her face and she immediately falls in love once again.

Katy can confirm all of this and has assured me that labor is indeed a painful experience, but once that child is born you do forget the pain and you focus on that little child who was brought into this world. And having experienced this three times, and soon to be four, I can only imagine the sheer joy and adulation she will have once this newest child is born.

And yet, the notion of pregnancy and labor is a picture that God wants to use to show us how our Christian life will be. It will not be easy. It will not always be joyful. It will be hard. It will be painful. It will be crushing and oppressive... but when we see Christ again, when our Savior comes back to us, when we are with Him in His eternal glory: ***He will turn our sorrow into joy.***

The life of a Christian is not easy. I just want to make sure I make that statement before we get going here today. A Christian life is not easy and it will not always be easy. The life a Christian leads is one of hardship and pain and tribulation and trial and difficulty. In fact, you would be hard-pressed to find one verse in the Bible which tells you that life this side of heaven is or will be easy.

Think about Peter who writes his letter to those Christians scattered around the world

who are suffering persecution. Think about Paul who is in chains because he wanted to spread the word of God. Think about John who was banished to an island by himself to live out his final days because he proclaimed Christ. None of these men lived a very ‘happy’ and ‘joyful’ life as we might call it.

We live in this world and we want comfort. We want immediate gratification for our desires. The ultimate show of this is Minute Rice. It took too long to cook rice, so now we can do it in a minute (well actually longer). The rise of convenience and of making things easier just shows the length we will go to not have to exert or try.

We have remotes because standing up to turn the channel was too hard. We have kindles and tablets because books are too heavy and cumbersome. We have email because sending something through the post office takes too long. We spend all of our lives

trying to make things easier... but when was the last time you tried to make something more difficult? Probably never right. In fact, when things are difficult we think that there is something wrong. And we take this same tact with God.

As Gerhard preached on this text, ***“We created these false illusions for ourselves that we will benefit most from Christ in this life; also, that whoever is dearest to Christ shall also have the best luck above anyone else. However, these were even the errant thoughts about the kingdom of Christ that were in the hearts of the disciples. Christ had so frequently preached against this very thing.”*** And Christ does preach against this time and again in His word.

In fact, think on the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart,

the peacemakers, those who are persecuted... you, when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. That is not a happy lot, nor are those people having the easiest of lives. Christ constantly reminds us that this life will be difficult... but we don't want to hear that.

We move about this world looking for comfort, for solace, for rest, for ease... and we get mad when we find none. We, in fact, get mad at God when we feel like we are having a hard time. Why would God do this to me? Why would God not just whoosh all my problems away? Why must God send so many crosses and tribulations into my life, can't my life just be easy? The answer is "No." No, your life cannot be easy... that promise was never made to you.

In fact, as Gerhard says about the 'good days' and the 'ease' of this life, ***"In good***

days the thoughts of our hearts meander about in this world, and it can easily happen that we cling to the temporal things in our hearts. However, through cross and tribulation we are driven towards God."

And it is true. When we have a life of ease we do not turn to God for help and support... but when things are going rough and there is much strain in our lives then we constantly turn to God for all that we need.

Besides all of this, the one thing that brings you the most joy is also the one thing that caused God the most pain and suffering. Yes, your salvation was brought through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived for us. He lived a perfect life of following God's laws and of carrying His cross. Constantly being mocked and abused for His belief and understanding of God. Jesus suffered and died for each and every

one of us. As He hung on the cross He experienced hell itself and shouted out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” This is what Jesus had to suffer for us and He did so willingly.

And three days later Jesus rose from the dead. He rose to proclaim that His life and His death were sufficient payment for all sins. He rose so that we would know that God the Father accepted the payment, the atonement, of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all of our sins. And now through faith in all that Jesus has done we have that forgiveness and we have heaven waiting for us when this life is over.

We have salvation because of what Jesus Christ has endured and done for us. Christ endured His cross and now He asks us to endure our cross.

This life is not easy and it will not be easy. There will be difficulty throughout this life.

Just as Jesus compares this life to childbirth, we will be in pain and agony often... but when we see Christ then all will be joy.

And is that not the case with your life? You live life outside of these walls looking for ease and comfort, looking to make things as easy as possible and for it we struggle... but once we come into God’s presence we are at peace. We walk into this gathering of Christians and all is well. We receive the forgiveness of all of our sins in Jesus’ name. We receive the very body and blood of our Savior for the forgiveness of our sins. We are washed and cleansed in water with His word in our baptism. God does everything He can to give us peace in this life, but never promises that it will always be the easiest.

An early church father relates about this text, ***“How could it make any sense if Christ had to hang on the cross and you wanted to constantly live in happiness? Would you be***

wanting to have your Paradise in this life, even though Christ had to suffer so much adversity here? Certainly not! Instead, let it be dear to you that you are made like unto Christ through tribulation.”

Friends, convenience is not sin. Having a portion of ease in your life is not sin. But when we focus our entire lives on the ease and comfort this life offers we are no longer focusing on Christ. When all we want is happiness and comfort we are not carrying our cross.

As Deutchlander says, ***“But Jesus had to take up the cross if the world was to be redeemed. And just as Jesus had to take it up willingly, so too must the Christian. Jesus does not say that He is going to impose the cross contrary to the will of His followers. He calls on the Christian, expects the Christian, to embrace the cross and to embrace it willingly... The***

alternative to cross bearing is the forfeit of the soul, that is, the forfeit of eternal life.”

Dear friends in Christ, during this life there will be sorrow. It will not be a sorrow that will destroy our faith or drive us to abandon God, but it is a sorrow that will allow us to trust in Christ and lean on Him all the more. We will sorrow because we will know that we cannot handle everything. We will sorrow because we will know that we have a sinful nature that does not cling to Christ always and for everything. We will sorrow because we will have to deny ourselves... but this sorrow will not last. For in a little while, when Christ appears, our sorrow will be turned into joy.

As Luther says, ***“Sorrow must be felt, but it shall not harm you, besides it shall not last long. Even by this the sorrow is already sugar-coated and tempered. Later, when the ‘little while’ has passed and triumphed,***

then one feels what Christ says, 'Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.' Then the true joy of the heart commences and the soul sings an eternal Hallelujah, and Christ is Risen - a joy which will in the life beyond be perfect, without a defect and without an end."

Thanks be to God that he has given us crosses in our lives to keep us focused on Him. Thanks be to God that He gives us the strength to carry these crosses in His word and sacraments. And thanks be to God that in a "little while" He will turn our sorrow into joy.

Thanks be to God. Amen.