

Jubilate

“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.” St. John 16:22

Are suffering and sorrow good for you? That depends on who you are. Today, Jesus is talking to His Christians. He promises them permanent joy. He promises that their sorrow will only last a little while, but their joy, forever. He promises: ask the Father for anything in My name and He will surely give it. To those who believe, suffering and sorrow draw them closer to God. In sorrow they learn to base their faith, not on the fleeting feelings of the moment or on their temporary successes, but on the clear words of the gospel. They learn not to judge God by what they feel God is doing, but rather to trust in God because of what He tells them He is doing. (Preaching & Sacraments) Thus, they learn to find God in Jesus' crucifixion where He suffered for them. Look to that suffering and that sorrow and know that if God can bring good out of that He can surely bring good out of your suffering as well. But suffering and sorrow is not good for those who do not believe. It embitters them. It makes them cynical and angry. It drives them to despair. It confirms them in their unbelief and their ungrateful denial of God's goodness. They point to their troubles as proof that God doesn't really care about them. They hear Christ speak of patience in trials and judge Him to be utterly absurd. And when your sorrows and suffering do such things to you, it is a sure sign that you are flirting with unbelief -- same as them. The problem is not the suffering and sorrow. The problem is the duration of it. The darkness of a tunnel is made oppressive because you can't see an end to it. This is why, when Jesus focuses on your emotions, He focuses on the time-frame. A little while is just a little while--though it may seem like an eternity. Meanwhile, what we see colors what we think, feel, and believe. So Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” The disciples would see Jesus arrested, beaten, mocked, spat upon, humiliated, and finally crucified. But their overwhelming sorrow would last just a little while. But at Jesus' resurrection, they would be filled with joy. Then they didn't remember the sorrow and the pain they had felt when watching helplessly, as He was led away like sheep to the slaughter. So it is with you. Jesus is hidden from our eyes and none of the promises He so graciously gives us any visual evidence to point to and rely on. Faith requires us to shut our eyes to what we see, feel, and experience. We are to ignore what appears obvious and we are to believe what is impossible. Faith is contrary to sight and sight is contrary to faith. “*A little while and you will not see Me.*” That made them sad. Their sorrow was deepened when they succumbed to the weakness of their flesh, denied Christ, and cowered in fear after His death. But while they were enduring this sorrow Jesus was bringing forth joy to the world. They were feeling *something*. But their feelings lied to them. This is why we cannot base our faith on how we feel. The waiting seems to be for so long because we are stuck here on earth where we have no greater perspective than what is visible up to the horizon.

How far away is that? Not very far. We cannot see the end of our troubles. And from this perspective, we are already in hell. Why bother with Christ? Why bother with the Ten Commandments? Why bother with anything if we are already in hell? Live for the moment. Do *whatever* it takes to dull the pain. you can't make it worse. Oh, but such thinking is so wrong. If only you could see around the corner! Because what you feel and think to be perpetual is only for a "little while." To turn back now is to miss the joy that lies beyond your short horizon. This is why you cannot afford to depend on what we see. This is why faith must demand, not sight, but God's promise. We go by what we hear, not by what we see. For the preaching of Christ's resurrection is a periscope over the horizon. To hear God's Word is to see around corners. It is to be rescued from the eternity of the moment and shown a different eternity. We read in Hebrews (12:2), “[*Look*] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus saw beyond the pain He would endure to the joy that was set before Him. Not letting the shame of the cross deter Him for it was only to be for a little while. It is only possible for us to endure suffering looking to Jesus who suffered for us. And through Christ, not only do we escape from the oppressing eternity of our present sorrow--not only do we learn that it will soon end-- But we also learn that since Christ has taken sorrow into His own hands on the cross, it now becomes for you a gift. That's right, a gift! The words “*a little while*” appear seven times in our text. The number seven is used symbolically throughout the Bible. God is three, as in the three persons of the godhead. The world is four, as in the four points of the compass. When God comes to the world through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, The number is seven and is the number of God's gracious rule in this world. Seven times “*a little while*” occurs in this portion of St. John's Gospel. This short season of tribulation is not God's wrath but His grace! All of your “little whiles” of suffering are under the gracious control of our Father. Therefore, not only must the end soon enough, but they also serve a purpose. They drive you to pray and to rely on Christ alone. In Christ, you have more than the promise that God knows what you need. You have the promise that whatever you ask in His name the Father will give you. The name of Jesus isn't a mantra with magical powers. It is rather the gracious authority in this world that flows from His wounds. It is the power to forgive short-sighted sinners on earth and give new vision. This power comes for you who are weakened by your own flesh. You are afraid. You lose heart. Your faith is so pathetically weak. You wonder if God cares, if His Words are true and His promises real. Ask to believe His promises and Words. Ask Him to allay your fears. Ask for a new and bold heart and strengthening of faith. Ask for the forgiveness of the One who suffered to make you glad. Ask and your joy will be full--and no one can take this joy from you. AMEN.