

Easter 4, 2020  
John 16:16-23

## Part I

When an expectant mother is pregnant, she knows the day will come to deliver the child. During that time, she has time to prepare. Not only does she have time to prepare, the father does too. So, the expectant parents take child birthing classes.

In those classes they learn about the coming birth. The classes do not sugar coat the pain of delivery. It is intense. They learn of the complications that can happen. Complications can be dangerous. The mother learns how to take short staccato-like breaths during the delivery. Those staccato-like breaths can be “coached” by the father.

It is all preparation for the day of delivery. Then, the day comes. The water breaks. The contractions begin. The parents head for the hospital. Pain begins to take over the mother’s body as the contractions get more intense. The intensity causes her to cry out in pain. The mother, Jesus says, is in the midst of anguish. Literally, he says, tribulation.

## Part II

Jesus did this same sort of thing for the disciples: he prepared them for the tribulation that lay ahead. It is what we find him doing in our text. It is the night before his death, Maundy Thursday. He wanted the disciples to know what was right before them that night and the next day, Good Friday.

That preparation, however, began well before Maundy Thursday. More than one time Jesus told his disciples what was going to happen. He told them that he would be rejected by the religious authorities, be killed and rise again.

The disciples heard the first two parts - that Jesus would be rejected and killed. The other part - that he would rise - they did not hear. So, one time, Peter tried to get Jesus to save his skin. He wouldn't. Another time the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus. They did not want to hear about him dying.

...but now it was time for the painful contractions to begin. It would, because Jesus was returning to the Father. He had come to do what the Father sent him to do - to take our place - to suffer the

Father's wrath for us - to die a bloody death in our place. After he completed that work - after he won salvation for us - he would return to the Father by rising from the dead.

That very night, then, it would be as if the disciples were gripped by labor pains. They would see Jesus arrested, abused, condemned, crucified. The one in whom they had hoped would be dead. Grief would grip their hearts. While they grieved, Jesus' enemies would rejoice.

It is what life is like for the church in this world. Like Jesus prepared the disciples, God's word prepares us for difficult days. It does not sugarcoat the reality of it. That is to say, Jesus' words not only apply to the disciples, but also to the church in general: You will weep and lament. The apostle puts it this way in another place: You through much tribulation must enter the kingdom of heaven.

To be sure, Jesus prepares us for such things. He does while life is good. He does, but it makes us uncomfortable. Like Peter we would rather save our own skin. Or like the others, we do not want to

hear about it. We would rather just hear that life will be good - that we will have success - that we will be accepted - that we can reach our dreams.

... but God keeps telling us that there will be tribulation - sorrow, weeping, anguish. He tells us that there will be times like this pandemic - times that bring sickness and death - times when we are sick and need to go to the doctor - times when we will have a lack of money - times when the devil afflicts us with such tribulation.

...and, when it comes, Jesus has prepared us. He has and the contractions begin. The labor pains of tribulation grip hearts. We have felt that. We have felt pain from the pandemic; sadness in our loneliness; grief over our losses. We have felt pain, sadness and grief whether it be from this pandemic or any other tribulation in our lives.

It is during such times that the devil tries to trick us; and by tricking us to afflict us. He afflicts us with thoughts like this: "Real" Christians are not sad - even in bad times - they are joyful. You, however, do not look joyful. There must be

something wrong with your faith. You must not be a real Christian.

### Part III

You know, a mother when she is in the midst of contractions - in the midst of delivery - cries out in pain - weeps tears of anguish. She is not joyful at the moment. Yet, she is still a mother. She is a mother in the midst of anguish. In this midst of that anguish there are possible complications that could prove dangerous - complications that generally are mitigated by today's medicine.

I don't know, but I can imagine that those minutes and hours can seem like an eternity in the mother's mind ... but, then, the moment of birth comes; the labor brings forth a child; and, the labor is over. A newborn has come to the world. The cries of anguish become the tears of happiness; grief is turned into joy.

In such a way, the three days Jesus lay in the grave the disciples grieved. They grieved as they prepared his dead body for burial. They wept tears at Jesus' grave. They hid behind locked doors in

fear. Those days must have seemed like an eternity.

...but then the labor pains of Jesus' death brought forth the joy of Jesus' resurrection. Risen from the dead, Jesus went to see his disciples hiding in fear. In his glorified body he passed through the locked doors where they hid. There he stood before them. He showed them his nail-marked hands and spear-marked side.

Jesus did and the risen Lord Jesus gave birth to gladness in the disciples hearts. They had gladness for sadness; joy for grief; laughter for weeping. They did, because Jesus' resurrection said that Jesus was greater than their worst enemies - sin, death and the devil. He had triumphed over them.

That gave the disciples a joy that no one could take from them. To be sure, after Jesus ascended and returned to his Father, they would face more tribulation. They would face false teachers, trials, imprisonment, martyrdom. They would have more sorrowful contractions - more labor pains. They would, but no one could take away the joy they had in the risen Lord Jesus.

To be sure, no joy can compare to that joy - the same joy we have in Jesus. It cannot, because Jesus has triumphed over our greatest enemies. The devil has lost his hold on you. He has, because Jesus paid for your sins in his death. His resurrection says so. You are forgiven of all your sin. Forgiven, death does not have the last word. Heaven is your home.

That is a joy no one can take from you. That does not mean Christians never feel sad - never feel depressed - never feel down and out- as the devil would like to trick you to think - to afflict you - to lead you to despair. No. It does not. Christians do feel sadness.

Just consider Job. Job, after he lost everything he had in life - his business - his means of making a living - his children - his health - his body covered with itching open sores, probably did not look very joyful.

Yet, though he felt sadness in his life, at the same time he had a confidence that ran deeper than the sadness he felt. It was confidence in Jesus. He expressed it this way: I know that my Redeemer

lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin surrounds my body again, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.

That is the confident joy you have - even though appearances may look otherwise - even though tribulations may make you feel sad. It is the confident joy of knowing that Jesus is risen from the dead - that Jesus has returned to the Father - that Jesus goes to bat for you at his Father's right hand, forgiving you of your sin - that Jesus bends his Father's ears to your needs so that you can take them to the Father - that Jesus has gone home to heaven to prepare a place for you; and, that one day he will come to take you there. This is a joy you have - that no tribulation - no sadness you feel - no one can take from you.

#### Part IV

Let's take a minute to think about that joy from another perspective. It is a joy of knowing that our present tribulation has an end. To that point, Jesus says that our present tribulation lasts "a little while." In fact, that phrase "a little while" stands out in our text. It does because it gets repeated. It gets repeated 7 times. It is as if it were to engrave



on our hearts the truth that our tribulation is temporary.

The apostle put it this way in another place: our light affliction is working in us a far greater weight of eternal glory. That seems like a strange way to put it. Our present affliction never seems light. It feels heavy. It wears us down. It can seem like an eternity. It can.

Yet, the apostle puts our affliction in the proper perspective. Against the backdrop of eternity the affliction we feel here is light compared to the weight of glory. To be sure, it does not feel light right now. It does not, but compared to glory that is another thing. The labor pains of affliction are for a time, but when time gives birth to eternity, the anguish will be over. Heaven will be forever.

That is true for Job. 3,000 years ago Job suffered tribulation for a time. Since then he has enjoyed heaven. He will forever. 2,000 years ago, the disciples suffered tribulation for a time. Since then they have enjoyed heaven. They will forever.

We, too, suffer tribulation for a time; and, tribulation reminds us of this truth - the world is broken by sin - broken by sin this world is not forever. Heaven is.

In times of tribulation, then, we are reminded just how much we need Jesus - how much we need his Word and Sacrament. In Word and Sacrament - the risen Lord Jesus stands in our midst; keeps us washed clean of our sin; keeps us clothed in his righteous robe, keeps us ready for heaven.

Then one day, the "little while" of tribulation will give birth to the eternal day of heaven. Then, we will be part of that countless crowd the apostle saw in heaven - that has come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, delivered from tribulation, time will give birth to eternity; temporal sadness to eternal joy. Amen!

