

“Sorrow into Joy”

Mothers’ Day was last week – but God’s Word to us today also spotlights a mother – one who is great with child. Jesus speaks of this mother in labor in order to teach all of us Christians what it means to be a child of God.

But before we get to the delivery room – let’s set the stage. The words of our text are the words which Jesus spoke to His disciples in that upper room on the night in which He was betrayed – that night when He instituted the Lord’s Supper – just before going to His crucifixion and death.

In preparation, Jesus says to these disciples: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” Jesus is preparing them for what will happen “in a little while.” “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again in a little while, and you will see me.”

What does He mean by “a little while”? Jesus knows that they are struggling to handle all that has been going on. Remember, this is Holy Week – and what a week it has been. “Truly, truly,” Jesus says to them, “you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.”

And that’s when Jesus sets before them this picture of a woman giving birth. You who are mothers – who have given birth to a child – you know, better than anyone else, what Jesus is talking about.

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come ...” The first thing that comes to mind is the pain that comes with labor. When the hour has come – apart from an epidural – there is not much that can be done to ease the pain. But that doesn’t stop us from trying.

Even before the labor begins, you are coached with breathing techniques to help relax the body. You massage the back – you walk around – you try to find a comfortable position --- all to endure the anguish that has come upon you.

Attending nurses are so good at assisting the mother and child. While others were trying to distract from the pain – they give helpful information and encouragement. It's good to know the facts – the timing of the contractions and so forth. And even though the status of the dilation creeps along at a snail's pace – appropriate bedside manner prevents them from saying – “oh, the pain is going to get much worse.”

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”

Given all that the mother has been through – the delivery often comes as a shock. It's not until the baby cries – or the doctor says, “you have a beautiful baby girl” – that the reality sinks in. Even then, she wants to see her baby – hold her baby. Then her sorrow is turned into joy – one of the greatest joys ever experienced this side of heaven. [P]

Remember, Jesus is preparing His disciples. The disciples have their own anguish. Their world has been turned upside down. For three years they had lived as disciples of Jesus Christ – and now, after “a little while” – He was gone. He was crucified, died and was buried.

Unlike the mother who is dealing with the life in her womb – the disciples are dealing with death and the tomb. They've entombed themselves behind locked doors for fear of the Jews – for fear that what happened to Jesus, will happen to His disciples.

In “a little while” their sorrow and fear are turned to joy. At first, they too are baffled, unsure. This news of Christ's resurrection is more than they can bear – but when the Living One stands in their midst – when they see and touch Him – their joy cries, out, “My Lord and my God!”

These words of our Lord Jesus Christ are not just for the disciples gathered in that upper room – but for all of us who live with the sorrows of this fallen world. Jesus is preparing us – us, who cannot see Him since He has ascended into heaven – but in “a little while” we will see Him – when He comes again on the Last Day.

And so He prepares you by giving you the Holy Spirit when He baptizes you – to guide you into all the truth. He preaches the Law of God which shows you the way you should go – but also accuses you of falling short of God’s will for your life. And to broken, contrite sinners, the Holy Spirit works by the Gospel to gather you to Jesus – to His atoning blood.

In the words of absolution, God the Holy Spirit leads you to hear them as the words of Jesus – which are none other than the words of the Father. You are given to hear, and believe the truth – that God loves, forgives, and restores you.

God the Holy Spirit declares to you the “things that are to come” – the trials and tribulations that you endure as a child of God, before entering the kingdom of heaven. He leads you into the truth that if the world has hated Jesus – they will hate you as well.

And just as Jesus was crucified – so also your old Adam must daily be crucified, with all his sinful desires, so that the new man may arise and live before God – to live in the midst of the anguish of this world.

So that your anguish, your weeping and lamenting, your sorrow may be turned into joy – God the Holy Spirit takes what is the Father’s and the Son’s – and gives it to you.

Christ’s Body and Blood, given and shed for you – are given to you to take away all your sin – to strengthen and protect you from the attacks of the enemies. Christ’s holiness and righteousness – given to you. His kingdom – where God and man are reconciled through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus – is given to you.

God dwelling with you, in these days, in this “little while” – in this time of anguish. The Lord and Giver of life dwelling with you – giving joy and salvation to you – through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.