

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday of Easter
John 16:16-22
April 22nd, 2018

Jesus says in the Gospel text appointed for today, “*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 to joy.*”

As I began to think about sorrow and joy, a couple of stories about Martin Luther came to mind. The reason is because Luther had many moment of sorrow turned to joy... and many that turned from joy to sorrow as well. So have we. But one particular part of his life illustrates this sorrow turned to joy. One part of the story you will recognize. The second part I imagine you have never heard before. Let’s begin with the story you probably know.

As a young monk almost 27 years of age, Luther was troubled by what he viewed as an angry God whose law was too difficult to keep. This led young Martin into a deep depression. He would punish himself by flogging his body, starving himself, and even sleeping outside in the dead of winter. He thought that more he did to punish his sinful ways the more God would love him and accept him. He was a man of great sorrow over his own sins as well as very judgmental God.

His father-confessor and good friend Johann von Staupitz came up with a way to help relieve the young monk of so much of his sorrow. He would send him on a mission – to the holy city of Rome. Luther would represent the observant Augustinian order in a dispute that would need to be decided by the Pope himself. So, Luther, and a colleague named Nathin, walked the entire 1600 miles that took him through Swabia, Bavaria and over the majestic snowy Alps. This journey was long and arduous but yet a tremendous blessing to Luther. He would see on his journey the *Mannleinlaufen*, an impressive mechanical clock in Nuremberg, 140 miles south of where his journey began. He would also see the Ulm Minster, a church with a steeple that rose 530 feet in the air, the tallest church in the world. When he finally arrived in Italy, he went through Florence and surely laid his eyes on the astonishing sculpture by Michelangelo known simply as *David* – which was completed just 7 years before Luther arrived. What joy it was for Luther to make such a remarkable pilgrimage.

Yet that joy would then turn to sorrow again. When he entered holy Rome, it was nothing like he imagined. It was a shrunken ghost of its glory depicted under the great Caesars. The huge walls surrounding the city did not have a majestic skyline. No, rather, it included a vast, pitted wasteland populated principally by wandering goats, cows and stray dogs. Even the people were animal-like. There were prostitutes everywhere – even the clergy who were visiting the holy city would visit these ladies of the night. A true “sin-city” is the way Luther could describe holy Rome. Sorrow over the condition of what he believed should look and behave in a much more righteous way.

Joy over the prospect of a journey. Joy within the journey... back to sorrow when he entered and experienced the city that had fallen from glory. But he was not going to miss his chance for joy on his way back to Germany. This is, now, the story that I imagine you do not know. Luther had a planned to visit the closest thing to heaven on earth he could possibly be in the presence of. She was a woman by the name of Anna Laminit.

Luther had to stop in Augsburg on his way back from Rome to view with his very own eyes a woman who was described as otherworldly. She was an ascetic – a person who lived far removed for others in order to become closer to God. However, she was a curious and extreme case indeed. It was said that she was so close to heaven that she needed no food or drink for sustenance. She transcended this world in a very palpable way – needing to never even urinate or defecate... she was *that* holy. She avoided the simplest physical necessities of human existence so thoroughly that she was thought to be, as it were, on par with the angels. Luther could turn his sorrow in to joy by seeing speaking, touching, and learning from such a righteous woman.

With joyful anticipation Luther hoped to discover whatever he could from her. He asked, “Do you long to go to heaven?” Her answer was surprising. She said, “Oh no! Here I know how things work, but

in heaven I don't know what will happen." Luther was baffled. How could someone so extraordinarily holy say such a thing? For Luther, joy turned to sorrow once again. How would he ever know how to become good enough to be loved by God?

Jesus reminds His disciples that sorrow – the sorrow of the world, of sin, of persecution, of unfairness, of anything you can think of produced by this world – will be turned into joy. But it won't be turned into joy by the world. It won't be turned into joy by a city, like Rome, and it won't be turned into joy by an otherworldly woman who is so holy she doesn't eat or drink. It will only turn into joy through Jesus.

I assume you have never walked 1600 miles to Rome on a pilgrimage. I assume you never met a woman like Anna. However, I also assume that you know sorrow and you know where it comes from. The world presses upon us from every angle – and it never seems to bring the comfort we so much desire or even expect. We think that the world owes us joy and from the world and all that is in it, we find it. If life could be fair, we think, I would get the joy I want from the life I have. But it never works that way.

Joy cannot be found in the world and in our lives apart from the one who brings joy – Jesus. In the midst of our sorrow over whatever it is that plagues our hearts this day, our Lord comes to us – through the means He provides to bind up our broken lives – to provide what we need. What bothered Luther about Anna is that she found her joy in the world and Luther couldn't. The same goes for us. We look all around us and all we see is sorrow and we wonder where is our joy going to come from? Where is relief in the midst of sorrow?

Jesus says, "*You will weep and lament while the world rejoices.*" It always seems to work that way. We say to ourselves... Everyone else is experiencing success. My life is a mess. Everyone seems so happy... just look at all the wonderful pictures on Facebook. They are so happy, their families are so wonderful. They are so blessed. How come I can't be that way? Look at what the world has given them. Why can't the world give me the happiness they have? I don't have any of that.

First off, let's be clear about God's promise for you today from this text. He promises you joy in Him. You have it. It's a gift. Joy is different than happiness. Happiness is a feeling – usually temporary. Joy is a state of being... something that is given and experienced even in the midst of hardship. Joy is what Jesus gives – hope and life. Joy will one day no longer remember anguish. Happiness will only forget it for a little while but joy is what we are placed into for all eternity. That's why we are given joy. Our Lord never promises happiness. I know that's a hard pill to swallow because we think so much of happiness. But, beloved in the Lord, joy is so much better. Joy endures. Joy is brought as a gift and in Christ will not be taken away. Joy is what gives us what we need for all eternity.

One last thing about Anna the most holy woman in all the world. The reason Anna found her joy from the world and didn't care to experience it in heaven is because she was a complete fraud. Her history is long and sorted but what you need to know is this: she was caught up in loose living while a teen in Augsburg. She was publically thrashed as punishment and then driven from the city. She found herself in a poorhouse ran by Christians who exposed her to Christianity. She reemerged as a "hunger martyr" and quickly became noticed for her prodigious devotion. Of course, this was all a scam. At one point she was invited to be the guest at the palace of the emperor of Bavaria where she was caught eating luscious fruit that she snuck into her room. She was quickly exposed as a fraud. After being caught she attempted to pull off more schemes – one of them was to collect money from a rich merchant traveler she had a child with, even though that child had died many years before. This trickery also caught up with her. She was eventually sentenced to death by drowning for all her discretions.

Joy cannot be found in the world. That is what we learn from our Lord. Joy is found in Christ. He will turn your sorrow into joy... That's a resurrection promise. He makes good on it. Amen.

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