

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Easter 6  
May 25, 2025  
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz  
***A moment of sorrow, an eternity of joy***

—John 16:16-24

On this Memorial Day weekend, I want you to move with me about three months into the future and 11 miles to the west. It's a Wednesday afternoon in late summer at Arizona Lutheran Academy. The football team is out on the practice field. It's 110 degrees. The monsoon clouds building in the sky tell you that this is not a day when anyone would say, "It's a dry heat." The team just finished running another round of wind sprints. Their practice uniforms, their equipment, everything is drenched in sweat. They run practice plays until they're ready to drop—and then they do it again. And again.

It's 1:30 a.m., but the lights are still on in the high school student's bedroom. No, they're not playing video games. There's a pile of books on the desk and a stack of notes to study. Tomorrow is an important exam, and the student is reading and rereading and memorizing, trying to get the information to stick. They can't wait to get to bed. They feel like they have to prop up their eyelids with toothpicks just to stay awake. But there's still at least another hour of studying before they'll be able to crash in their bed.

The married couple sits in the living room together watching television. "Together" might be an overstatement because they are sitting in separate chairs several feet apart, and they seem more interested in the TV than in each other. She glances over at him, and she sees nothing at all of the handsome, charming young man she fell in love with 30 years ago. He looks in her direction, and he sees nothing of the vivacious, beautiful young woman who captivated his heart. The romance has faded and only routine and the tedium of marriage go on. So they turn their attention back to the television and the program that takes them to faraway places filled with excitement and adventure. They know they might never get to those exotic places on the screen, that life might always seem boring and routine in comparison, but they're married, they're committed to each other, and married they will stay.

My daughter Ruth is eight months pregnant. She was the only one of our four children who was not able to be here for my Mom's funeral a couple weeks ago because she is, well, eight months pregnant. Those of you who are Moms know what it's like in those last couple months of pregnancy. You say, "I just want it to be over! I want to meet this kid!" But you know before that can happen there is the pain of childbirth, the anguish of labor and delivery.

Why do it? The team pours out its sweat in practice hoping for the joy of holding high a trophy at the end of the season. The student studies hard to master the material, so they can keep up their GPA, do extremely well on the SAT, and score a nice college academic scholarship. The married couple does it because they are committed to each other, and the joy of their love transcends fleeting romantic fancy, and they're going to honor the vows they made to each other. The mother goes through the misery and the morning sickness and the discomfort, and it all evaporates into the joy of holding a newborn baby.

We get the concept, don't we? Make sacrifices now, endure hardship now, put up with discomfort now, so that you can be filled with joy later. No pain, no gain. We get it!

But that doesn't mean we like it. No, this is a concept that our natural self doesn't want to embrace. Because when we are in the throes of pain or sorrow or despondency or discomfort, we just want it to go away. We don't want to wait for something joyful to come, we don't want to work for it, we don't want to save for it. We just want it. It's like we expect the good life without pain or responsibility.

Our Scripture today takes us back to the upper room on the night of Holy Thursday, where Jesus is teaching his disciples. It was a special time, as Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal, and Jesus instituted Holy Communion. But in just a few hours Jesus would be hanging from a cross. Jesus told his disciples these things before Good Friday and Easter, so they could be filled with joy after Easter. "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me," said Jesus. This was the culmination of Jesus' entire ministry. This is why he came, to sacrifice himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, to lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus' whole mission on earth was about to be completed. But it would be completed only at great cost. Jesus would have to suffer great pain, as he was cast away from his Father and covered in this world's guilt. Forgiveness for your sins and mine could only be purchased with the holy, precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. Achieving the greatest victory and attaining the highest joy could only be accomplished with the greatest sacrifice.

The joy of that quiet evening in the upper room would soon be replaced by violence in the garden, a swinging sword, a severed ear, and hands laid on Jesus to arrest him and put him on trial. The disciples ran and hid or watched from a distance, as everything played out just as the prophets had foretold. What they saw was horrible and robbed them of

all joy. On the cross Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we were healed. The body was laid in the tomb, and the stone to the tomb was rolled shut. But it didn't stay shut. On Sunday morning a heavenly messenger rolled the stone away, sat on it, and said to the early morning visitors, "Why are looking for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." And once the disciples wrapped their heads and their hearts around the fact that Christ the crucified was really alive, they were filled with an inexpressible joy that no one could take away. It was just as Jesus had said in the upper room, "So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

Have you noticed how people's personalities change, depending on the circumstances? It is so easy to be nice and pleasant and upbeat and positive when everything is going well in your life. When your team wins, when your bills are paid, when your health is great, when your friendships are strong, what's not to like? It's not hard to be friends with someone when they give you what you want, treat you nicely, stroke your ego, and serve your purposes. The salesperson is always friendly when he's trying to close the deal; he wants your money—of course he's going to be nice to you! But that kind of pleasant, agreeable behavior and personality is not the real person. You want to learn more about someone's real character? Watch and see how they react when things aren't so rosy. How do they react when they're not getting what they want from you? How do they respond when you tell them something they don't want to hear? How do they stand up when the bottom falls out of their world, when they can't pay their bills, when life isn't easy, when circumstances are hard? Then see how they react, because that is an indicator of their true character. When they hear something they don't like, do they explode with rage, shout expletives, and storm off? Or do they listen carefully and respectfully, respond with patience and level-headedness, and try to work out the problem? When health is sapped, and every day is wracked with pain and misery, sorrow and loneliness—do they bear up with strength and optimism, or do they become angry and bitter and complaining?

How do you respond to adversity? To setbacks? To misfortune? To serious illness? To tragedy? Do those events and circumstances in your life make you into a different person? If you're going through some tough times, I could give you some advice that even the world can give you: Suck it up! Learn to deal with it! Don't be a wimp! When the going gets tough, the tough get going! Be brave! Be strong! Even the world recognizes the need to face difficulty with strength.

But Jesus gives you and me more than that. He gives you his Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of Truth gives us more than the ability to reach down deep inside and find some inner strength. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus and the joy of Jesus' resurrection and the joy of Jesus' victory over death. The Holy Spirit convinces us that our sins are forgiven in Christ; and because our sins are forgiven, we are in a right relationship with God; and because we are in a right relationship with God, the all-powerful Creator of the universe loves us and works out all things for our eternal good; and because our Creator and Redeemer works out all things for our eternal good, there is nothing that can separate us from God's love in this life or the next, and though you may pass through moments of sorrow in this life, there is waiting for you an eternity of joy. The Spirit of God testifies to you of those things. The Comforter that Jesus promised his disciples that same night when he was in the upper room, the Holy Spirit points to Jesus and fixes your eyes on Jesus, so that in the midst of sorrow, adversity, poverty, pain—whatever!—you continue to wait for Jesus with undiminished joy.

When we are in the midst of suffering it seems so intense, and it seems like it's never going to end. "Give me something for the pain! Make it go away!" Sitting up through the night with a sick child; it seems like the minutes crawl by and the morning will never come. Hardship seems like it lasts forever in the moment. But in reality, this life, with all its setbacks and suffering, is so short, and it passes so quickly. It's just a blink of an eye in comparison to eternity. This is why Scripture says we can rejoice in our suffering, because suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope. It calls our struggles in this life "light and momentary troubles" (1 Cor. 4:17) before an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. We are secure in the Lord's hands and bound for heaven.

Jesus teaches that point using the example of childbirth. "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."

The disciples witnessed the gruesome horror of Jesus' crucifixion, but on the third day that horror was completely overcome by the joy of seeing Jesus alive after his resurrection. Sorrow was replaced by exuberant joy. But the disciples' lives were not yet over—just as our lives are not yet complete—and each of the disciples would go on to know further hardships in this life. All of those men who saw Jesus alive suffered persecution. All but one was put to death in a most gruesome, horrifying way. They suffered, and they refused to give up Jesus, and they stood firm to the end, and in death they earned the martyr's crown. Why? Because they knew that the light and momentary troubles of this life soon give way to eternal glory. They were faithful to death, and they received the crown of life.

When we get to heaven, do you think the struggles and hardships of this life will even matter? A moment of sorrow, in exchange for an eternity of joy? Amen.