



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday After Easter, April 21st, 2012

In the Name of the Father and of the Son

And of the Holy Ghost, Amen

“Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”

The scripture lessons for the Sundays after Easter speak to us not only of our Saviors resurrection, but also of the character of our own risen life in him. The Gospel lessons for the last three Sundays after Easter are all taken from the Gospel according to Saint John and recount Jesus' discourse with his disciples at the Last Supper. In today's lesson, Jesus warns the disciples about his departure from them and the anguish that will involve. But there is a purpose in that suffering. It will be the birth-pangs of a new form of life for them. “Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”

This is sorrow with a purpose. New life involves suffering. And so it must be with the disciples.

Only when their earthly hopes, visions, and personal ambitions were shattered in the darkness of doubt and despair, would they give birth to the new life of faith in the wholly other. Only when they had learned the absolute insufficiency of their old nature could they find their true sufficiency in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Only then would they learn to know God as Spirit. “If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” That shattering, that sorrow, would be the pre-conditions of true joy.

Here Jesus explained his departure, and foretold their sorrow. But to explain sorrow, to open it to reason, does not ease the reality of the pain of the experience when it comes. So it was with the disciples. The death and

resurrection of Jesus was not, at the onset, an occasion of joy, but of fear. They could not, with their finite understanding, see the point of it all. They were afraid. They ran away and hid. But, as Jesus had promised, their sorrow, their fear, their bewilderment, their shattering of natural hopes and natural sufficiency was not pointless. It was only through all this that the disciples were enabled to know the risen Christ, and to receive the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through them. "He will lead you into all truth." All their sorrow was as pains of travail – out of it came new life, a new kingdom of the Spirit, a new spiritual world.

What was true for those first disciples is true also for all of us who would be followers of Christ. We, who would be risen with Christ must heed his admonition: there is no new life without the pains of travail. "In this world ye shall have tribulation." It is part of our dying to the world in order to gain new life with Christ. It is our salvation being worked out – "like as silver, which from the earth is tried, and purified seven times in the fire." Only in that purification is the Spirit's gift realized in us. In the perspective of God's providence, in the pattern of salvation, sorrow, fear, and doubt are not just unfortunate accidents. They are steps in God's preparing

us for his Kingdom. Christ's wounds are the signs of his glory, and so must ours be.

Today as we partake in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus we rejoice in his Resurrection and Ascension. "Be of good cheer," says Jesus, "I have overcome the world." Your sorrow will be turned into joy." *AMEN*