
DISTRESS AND PEACE
Sermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 2022
John 16:23-33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel Reading read before, John 16:23-33: **In that day you will not ask Me any questions. Truly, truly, I tell you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete! ²⁵ I have been telling you these things in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures of speech but shall report to you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷ For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and because you have believed that I have come forth from God. ²⁸ I have come forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.”**

²⁹ His disciples said, “Look! Now You are speaking plainly and are not speaking any dark saying. ³⁰ Now we know that You know all things and do not need to have anyone ask You questions. By this we believe that You have come forth from God.”

³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Look! The hour is coming and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and you will leave Me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ I have spoken these things to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have distress. Nevertheless, have courage! I have overcome the world.”

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are very few guarantees in life, very few things you can be sure of. For instance, there are no guarantees about the success of your favourite sports team. They could be riding high one minute and shot down the next. You have no guarantee that you're going to be rich or, if you are, that you're going to stay that

way. Things could go south in a hurry. You have no guarantee about your health. You could be fit as a fiddle one year and then come down with a mysterious disease the next. There are no guarantees.

Today, however, from our text, Jesus tells us of *two things* about which we can be sure, and they are these: “Distress and Peace.”

Distress and peace are two things we can all be sure of, two things we can count on, and two things that are guaranteed to come our way if we are Christian.

Let’s start with distress.

Distress is something we can expect in life - Jesus Himself says so. He said to His disciples, “**In the world you have distress.**”

This distress comes in various forms and from various sources. For example, there is the distress that comes simply from living in a fallen world. Things don’t work right. Cars or machinery break down. Nature doesn’t work right. There are fires and floods, drought and hail. It’s too dry when farmers want to plant and too wet at harvest time. People don’t do the right thing. They do things that hurt us, whether directly or indirectly. Economic decisions, way above our heads, cost us money. Or, more directly, thieves break in and steal our stuff. There’s emotional hurt, too. People we care about betray us and break our hearts. People we love - we see them suffering, and we suffer, too. We lose the people we love, whether to death or to distance, and we miss them. All these are different distresses we face simply by living in a fallen world, and it doesn’t matter if you’re a Christian or not. You’ve got your distress, your troubles; I’ve got mine. But the point is, we’ve all got them, in one form or another.

All this distress comes at us from the *outside*, but there is also distress we bring on ourselves, foolish decisions we make that we later regret, dumb things we do when we should have known better. We disregard the wise counsel that friends or family members have given us, only to see later that they were right. Most importantly, however, we often ignore and disobey God’s Word about the right way to live. That’s called sin, and we are responsible for that. God gives us His commandments for our good. Our Creator knows the best way for His creatures to live, and when we don’t listen to God, when we tune Him out, we bring distress on ourselves. Again, this is something that we all do, and it doesn’t matter if you’re a Christian or not.

But then there is distress that Christians endure, and that is what Jesus is primarily talking about today when He tells His disciples, **“In the world you have distress.”**

The whole context in these chapters of John is about how things are going to be different now that Jesus is going away and returning to His Father. Life is about to get a whole lot more difficult for the disciples. Remember, Jesus is saying this on the night in which He is about to be betrayed, arrested, and put on trial. In the morning, He will be taken to the Roman governor, scourged, mocked, unjustly sentenced, and put to death on a cross. Do you want to talk about distress? That’s distress! And because the world hated Jesus, it is going to hate His followers, too. Disciples get treated like their master, so Jesus is preparing them for that. He’s preparing us. **“In the world you have distress.”**

Whether back in the first century or now in the twenty-first century, the followers of Jesus have always been facing distress in the world. This world is a hostile place for Christians. The values of the world conflict with what Christians believe and how we are to live. Think of all the evils that are considered good in the eyes of the world these days: abortion, single-sex marriage, greed, gambling, divorce, shacking up, and sexual immorality of every conceivable form. The world calls evil good and good evil. They not only do these things but give approval to those who do them.

It’s no surprise, then, that the world is so hostile to Christians. If Christians call a thing what it is; if we call sin “sin,” if we know and say and demonstrate by our lives that certain behaviours are right and certain behaviours are wrong, and that this is what God Himself says about the matter, well, then we represent a threat to what the world wants to do. What’s more, trusting in God and His goodness, believing that salvation is to be found in Jesus Christ alone and not in the false gods of man’s own making - we represent a condemnation of all idolatry and false belief. When we say that all men are sinners and are not righteous in themselves and that all people need the righteousness found only in Christ, this goes against the pride of mankind, and the world will hate us for it. And so, we stand in the crosshairs of the world. The world will hate us because they first hated Christ. Thus, we can expect and count on the fact that in this world, we shall have distress, just as Jesus said we would. It’s guaranteed.

Distress comes to all, and sometimes it gets so bad that we struggle to see any light at the end of the tunnel. When you’re down in the pit, you do feel all alone. But remember, as brothers and sisters here in this family called the church - we also have been through many storms, and we are called to care for and support one

another when we see a sister or brother who is hurting. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort! He comforts us in all our distress, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any distress, with the same comfort with which God comforts us”* (3-4).

“Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen; nobody knows but Jesus.” That’s the big thing. Jesus knows what we’re going through. He is the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.¹ We have a high priest, now ascended at the right hand of God, who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses and our troubles. *“Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it!”* (Hebrews 4:10). *“Cast all your anxiety on Him! For He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). *“Call on Me in a day of trouble,”* God says, *“I shall deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”* (Psalm 50:15). *“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete”* (John 16:24).

So, distress is guaranteed. However, peace is also guaranteed. Listen again to what Jesus says to His disciples: **“I have spoken these things to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have distress. Nevertheless, have courage! I have overcome the world.”** Earlier in this same discourse, Jesus had said: *“Peace I am leaving with you. A peace that is My own I am giving to you. I am not giving it to you as the world gives it. Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid!”* (John 14:27).

Peace, the peace of God in Christ - this peace, which the world cannot give, Jesus gives to us. It’s a peace that the world cannot take away. Even in the midst of distress - *especially in the midst of distress* - we have this peace to comfort and quieten our souls. In the world, we shall have distress, but in Christ, we have peace. That is guaranteed.

Now, this is not just happy talk, a denial of reality, or some kind of wishful thinking. This is not saying, *“Peace,”* when there is no peace. No, there really is this peace, objectively so. It exists; it is objectively established. This peace is a reality, even when we can’t see it or feel it. This is the peace that Christ has established by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb. Christ Jesus has established this peace in His body on the cross. Jesus has made peace between heaven and earth, between God and man. Our sins had alienated us from God, and by nature, we were enemies of God, but now Christ has reconciled us back to God,

¹ Isaiah 53:3

establishing peace. The Apostle Paul writes that God “*has reconciled us to Himself through Christ... God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

His cross, therefore, is our bridge across troubled waters. When we are in trouble, when we are experiencing distress of any sort, we know that we are at peace with God, and that changes everything. Whatever the worst is that the world can do to us, whatever is the worst that life in this fallen world can dish out at us, we know that *nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*.² God is at peace with us, we are at peace with God, and nothing can disturb that.

So, this objective peace, established by Christ, brings a subjective peace - dare I say it, the feeling of peace - to our hearts and minds and souls. This is a great comfort and relief in the midst of sorrows, for we know that *right now*, our heavenly Father is watching over us and caring for us. We know that right now, our Saviour Jesus Christ knows each one of us by name, and that He is interceding for us³, and that He is ruling all things for the sake of His church. We have the Holy Spirit speaking peace to our hearts.

Finally, we know that ahead of us, when this brief life of distress comes to an end, there is the eternal peace and joy of the life to come. We shall join that white-robed multitude who have come out of the great distress and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.⁴

Dear friends, we, who have been baptised in the name of Jesus and are trusting in Him for our salvation: Our names have been written in the Lamb's book of life. We have a place reserved in the holy city, the new Jerusalem. That, too, is guaranteed. Life and light will fill that city. God and all the saints will be there, and so will you and I, ever rejoicing.

All this is because of the peace won and established by Christ. He has overcome the world. He forgives our sins. The peace He gives is greater than our troubles. His peace is greater than our feelings. This peace is ours today, and it will get us through tomorrow. That is guaranteed. Amen.

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

² Romans 8:31

³ Romans 8:34

⁴ Revelation 7:14

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lord, our God, You alone know the plans that You have for us and our world, but we rejoice and worship You because we know that they are loving plans. In Your goodness, You spread life, love, beauty, and joy throughout Your creation. In Your grace, You lighten the misery of our sinful lives, and bless us with pardon and peace. If it is your will that we must pass through troubles, enable us to turn them into opportunities, for Your glory.

We give You our warmest thanks for the precious gift of Your Son, Jesus, whom You have sent that we may have life in all its fullness. We praise You that He has humbly come into our world, has taken on Himself our sins, and has carried them to death on the cross. We glorify Your name for our release from the power of death, and for our sure hope of heaven through His resurrection.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege of being Your spiritual priests, as we pray in Jesus' name. We thank You for Your promise to hear all our prayers. Keep us close to Jesus each day in faith and love, gladly hearing His Word and following Him, wherever He leads us. Send Your Word out into the whole world, that it may achieve what You have planned for it. Let us as Your representatives, whom You have called out of darkness, proclaim Your light in this dark world. Give us the courage also to speak Your word of judgment when people reject Christ, the Cornerstone.

Bless Your Church on every continent. Renew Your people to be a loving fellowship of believers, a family of trust and prayer, and people who are ready to serve the needy in love.

Lead all the nations of the earth along the ways of justice, righteousness, and peace. Look with special favour on our country. Give to our Prime Minister, to the Premiers of each State, to our cabinets and parliaments, to our police and to our courts, such qualities of heart and mind that they may carry out their duties earnestly, wisely, and fairly. Protect us from all enemies, both within and without our country. Remove all strife from us. Inspire obedience to all law and order. Fill all citizens with love of holiness and moral purity. Grant that all who work in industry may find joy in their work and receive proper rewards for their efforts. Give satisfaction to those who work in the professions, as they work for the good of all. Give those who farm the soil favourable weather. Bless their work of feeding the world.

Bless all our loved ones, and make our homes places of peace. We remember especially the sick, the troubled, and the bereaved. In Jesus' name free them from the burdens of their pain and sadness.

Keep us standing strong and steady in faith. Since serving You is never useless, give us the opportunity to be busy in Your work. In Jesus' saving name we offer You these prayers. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 16:9-15

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia, who was standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" ¹⁰ As soon as Paul had seen the vision, we immediately looked for a way to go to Macedonia, since we concluded that God had called us to tell them the Good News.

¹¹ After we had put out to sea from Troas, we sailed straight to Samothrace and the next day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a city belonging to the first part of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We continued to stay in that city for some days. ¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside of the gate and along the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had assembled there.

¹⁴ There was a woman by the name of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, who came from the city of Thyatira and who was a worshipper of God. As she was listening, the Lord opened her heart to take heed of the things that were being said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she

and her family had been baptised, she urged us, "If you are convinced that I believe in the Lord, come to my house and stay!" She urged us strongly.

Revelation 21:9-14, 21-27

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who were holding the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and told me, "Come! I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

¹⁰ He carried me away in the Spirit to a large, high mountain and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It had the glory of God. Its brilliance was like a very precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, with twelve angels at the gates. Names had been written on the gates and are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east side, three gates on the north, three gates on the south and three gates on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...

²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was made

of a single pearl. The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. ²² I did not see any temple in the city. For the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city also does not need the sun or the moon to shine in it. For the glory of God has given it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their splendour into it. ²⁵ Its gates will not be shut at all by day. For there will be no night there. ²⁶ People will bring the splendour and wealth of the nations into it. ²⁷ Nothing that defiles and no one who does anything abominable or tells lies will ever come into it, but only those who have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

John 16:23-33

²³ In that day you will not ask Me any questions. Truly, truly, I tell you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete! ²⁵ I have been telling you these things in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures of speech but shall report to you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in

My name, and I do not say to you that I shall ask the Father on your behalf.

²⁷ For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and because you have believed that I have come forth from God. ²⁸ I have come forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father."

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