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Easter 4, Mother's Day
May 12, 2019
John 16:16-22
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Alleluia!

[Jesus said:] "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."

On this Mother's Day, Jesus compares the experience of a believer in this world to a woman in childbirth. So, let's consider Jesus' mom, the mother of our Lord.

Archangel Gabriel came to her and announced that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and in her womb would be conceived the promised Christ. We often picture her serene and with absolute trust in God—at least, that's what the paintings have her looking like. We know that she had great devotion to God. But does that mean she would have been free of anxiety and fear? How would she explain the pregnancy to her betrothed, Joseph? Joseph was a good man—a righteous and just man, says Matthew's account. But would Joseph understand? Instead of telling him, our Lord's mother heads to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Somehow—filled with the Holy Spirit, we're told—Elizabeth knows and rejoices. But how would this young maid explain it to her and the rest of the family? In both cases, a Word of the Lord comes to those involved. Our Lord's mother and the others are comforted.

Trial and hardship, though, wouldn't end there. Because of a government census, Joseph and his wife were forced to move near the pregnancy's end. When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room at the inn. They made do, but it most assuredly wasn't easy. 40 days later, when mother presents her child at the Temple in Jerusalem, old Simeon speaks words that would haunt her all her days: "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)." That sword pierced her soul on the family trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was left behind. For three days they searched. Three days her soul ached. But another trip to Jerusalem some 20 years later would break her. Her soul was pierced when the Centurion raised his lance and pierced her Son's side on the cross.

This is the sorrow of which Jesus speaks to His disciples. He will die. They will see Him no longer. But in a little while—three short days, not even 72 hours—they will see Him again. The sorrow will be turned to joy.

As His mother saw His limp body taken down from the cross, she wept. Her soul was pierced. Oh, how she must've wailed. Wailing was the custom. If ever there was a reason to wail, surely the death of her perfect, innocent Son was cause! No mother can say her child is perfect and speak perfect truth. But this mother could. She alone. And so her wails would've filled the ears of the soldiers who executed her boy, would've wracked her friends as they feebly tried to console her, would've wickedly brought a smile to the face of those who rejoiced in His death, and would've filled the ears of God, the heavenly Father Himself! If ever she had before wailed so greatly, it would've been some 30 years earlier as she labored to give birth.

Our souls are pierced—maybe not so dramatically, so flagrantly. We can only handle so much. The mother of our Lord could handle more than most, it seems. But that doesn't minimize our struggles. While the disciples feared persecution—feared being crucified, murdered alongside their Lord—we fear other things. (Most of us don't fear someone attacking us during church. And we probably won't until someone does it.) What do you fear? The increasing sin of our society? Paying the bills? Kids moving away? Climate change? Death, yours or another's? These are all real fears. Do they cause you distress, anxiety, despair? Do they make you wail? Perhaps. You know that which pierces your soul and how deeply. The saints of old hold no monopoly on fear. Another's fear can't mitigate or minimize your own.

Jesus promised, "And again in a little while, you will see Me." They did. His mother saw Him again. She was in the upper room with the disciples, we're told, when tongues of flame rested upon them. There's no doubt in my mind. The mother of Jesus saw Him during the 40 days after His resurrection. The disciples would've told her—if the women hadn't told her first, right? And Jesus wouldn't have been so cruel to avoid seeing a mother who loved Him so dearly. I suspect their reunion was a very special thing. Her sorrow banished, cast away. Her eyes filled with tears of joy. Like the disciples, she would've touched Him. Her soul, which magnified the Lord before, would've been made to

magnify Him once more, her spirit rejoicing in God, her Savior. God would've regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden, blessed her, done great things to her, and exalted her.

Jesus' resurrection makes all the difference. Sorrow is banished. Joy is bestowed. Fear is cast away. Love, perfect love, casts out all fear. The proud are laid low. The lowly are lifted high. Wailing is stopped. Rejoicing shouts!

Jesus' resurrection makes all the difference, because it means that all our fears will be removed. Our sorrow, which may last for a time, will come to an end. Though the disciples didn't see Jesus for a little while, they saw Him again... and He saw them. The mother of our Lord saw her Son. Her soul, which had been pierced, was healed by His presence. His promise gave her everlasting hope.

So, too, with us. Jesus' resurrection is a promise for us. The disciples could face persecution and death, could have Christian patience and trust, because they had the blessed hope of everlasting life. Jesus' resurrection has within it the promise that society's sinfulness will be stopped and that all will be made right. While we may be concerned with making rent and paying our bills, it means that He is preparing a place for us, an eternal home. And to our fear of kids moving away, of family being separated, the resurrection means that we shall be reunited with all the family of God, all children of the heavenly Father. Climate change? While given to be good stewards of this precious creation, we also take comfort in knowing that a new heaven and a new earth awaits us—creation itself, says St. Paul, awaits its redemption. The resurrection speaks to that because, just as our bodies will be restored, so too will creation. And finally, of death itself, the resurrection declares, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" We have the victory in Christ Jesus, our Lord!

Now, we wait, much as a pregnant woman waits for the day of her deliverance. We feel the pains, the aches, the sickness. We even sorrow. Just as it was with the mother of our Lord. And just like the mother of our Lord, we needed a Savior. In her Son, in Jesus, we have a Savior, the only Redeemer, who died for our sin and who rose again from the dead. His resurrection and its promises give us great cause to shout for joy! Therefore, wait, wait eagerly for our deliverance. It will be a very special day. We will see Jesus... and He will see us.

In His name.