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Acts 2:14a, 22-32, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31, Psalm 16

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory...(1 Peter 1:8, KJV)

Today's Bible readings are permeated by references to joy — aye, a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." And well we should speak of joy on this, the Second Sunday of Easter. The enthusiasm of last Sunday's Easter acclamation — Christ is risen! Alleluia! — should continue for the Sundays after Easter, and, indeed, for the rest of our lives. The instinct to rejoice at the resurrection of Jesus is an earthly echo of heaven's eternal Sanctus, Holy, Holy, Holy, gladly springing to the lips of angels and archangels and all the saints up yonder.

And so it is, that everywhere we look in today's liturgy, we see references to joy. In our First Lesson, for example, from St. Peter's Pentecost sermon, we hear St. Peter quote from Psalm 16, saying

²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;

Likewise, our Epistle Reading, from First Peter, speaks of this "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

And our Gospel reports the joy of the disciples when suddenly the resurrected Jesus appears among them:

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.(John 20:19-20)

Even the appointed Prayer of the Day speaks of joy, as if setting the tone of the day with its opening sentence:

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the festival of our Lord's resurrection.

And yet, can we not perceive in our Epistle Reading a complexity concerning Christian joy? There is a subtlety in that reading from First Peter. This is a passage that speaks simultaneously of joy and "heaviness" — heaviness of heart, heaviness of spirit.

The apostle begins by exulting in the Easter resurrection of Jesus. He piles up the benefits of the resurrection.

Easter means, for example, that God has "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope."(1 Peter 1:3).

And Easter means for us an inheritance in heaven:

⁴To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

Naturally, Christians should rejoice at the prospect of this heavenly inheritance.

But now we come to the complexity to which I refer. Yes, Christians should rejoice at Easter and all its benefits, and yet in this fallen world there still remains the simultaneous possibility of both joy and troubles. And so we can rejoice in our heavenly inheritance. But notice how the apostle continues his thought:

⁵Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

Modern translations, as much as I am grateful for them, seem to miss a distinction to be found in the original Greek text. The Greek speaks of both **lupe,w** “lupeo,” which means “grief,” and **peirasmo,j** “peirasmos,” which means “trial.” That is, the underlying text distinguishes between “trials” and “grief” at those trials.

Modern translations, like the New Revised Standard Version, speak of “suffering” various trials:

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials

But maybe you see my distinction: It is one thing to suffer or to endure a trial. It is something else to be grieved at the trial, to be dispirited by that trial, or, as the King James Version puts it, to be in “heaviness through manifold temptations.”

“Trials” describe what is happening to you. “Heaviness” describes how you feel about those trials. Some trials you can take in stride. But some trials are heavy and knock you to your knees.

I am getting at a distinction especially on display in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, in the Garden, Jesus prayed to be spared “the cup” soon upon him. And he prayed his way through to victory, concluding his prayer with his great model of Christian submission: “Nonetheless, not my will, but thine be done.”

But another part of that story is the “heaviness” of spirit under which Jesus suffered in Gethsemane. Notice the anguish in Jesus as he speaks to his disciples:

³⁷And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. ³⁸Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.(Matthew 26:37-38, KJV)

In our Epistle Lesson, St. Peter knows of what he speaks. He knows a joy that is “unspeakable and full of glory.” But also he knows of a heaviness of spirit, for he is the one about whom Jesus prophesied a martyrdom. And by the time of this morning’s reading, that cup is drawing near. Peter is old man. By tradition he is already in Rome when he writes this letter, and his death draws nigh.

Furthermore, he is writing to Christians in the Roman province of Asia Minor who seem to be experiencing the scorn of their neighbors, maybe even persecution. They have a right to their heaviness of spirit. But also they have a right to Christian joy based on the resurrection of Jesus.

Last semester, my son David took a course on The Atmosphere at his college, SUNY-Albany. He explained to me about jet streams. In our northern hemisphere, jet streams are westerly winds high up in the sky, at the transition between the stratosphere and the troposphere. So, way up in our sky, there are winds meandering in their paths but generally blowing from the west to the east.

Meanwhile, down here at our city level, the winds and the breezes can be blowing every-which-a-way. Thus, our one atmosphere has a complexity of movement, with simultaneous motions sometimes in opposite directions.

And so it might well be in your soul this Sunday movement. Swirling around in your heart might be both Easter joy and heaviness of spirit because of troubles and disappointments in your life.

Not all of us are Samson. I love that Biblical character of old. A thousand Philistines come charging toward, and the man doesn't seem to flinch:

¹⁴And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. ¹⁵And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.(Judges 15:14-15, KJV)

But many of us are not like Samson. For many of us, not only do we know troubles, but we are troubled thereby. Tears of sadness and tears of joy can mingle together on our cheeks.¹ We can experience both at the same time, and we often do. Life is like that!

I know some of your trials. Because of our pastoral conversations, I know of disappointments in love, grief at illness and decline, worry over employment and what will happen to your family.

You cannot help the chaos of emotions that might dwell simultaneously within your soul. But I think that you can control the emotional foundation of it all.

Consider Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We have recalled his heaviness of spirit there. We know that he prayed through to victory, such that when the soldiers came to fetch him away to the cross, he calmly went with them. He did not try to run away in terror. We do not know the details of his night of prayer in that garden, but cannot we not conclude at least this much: In that night of prayer, when he was in such agony of soul that sweat fell from him like great drops of blood, Jesus fought his way through to hope, rather than to despair. He was buffeted by both the negative and the positive, by the gloom of the cross and by the hope of the resurrection, and in the end, he chose hope.

Our Maker seems to have so constructed us that our heart tends to follow our feet. In the swirling emotions of your soul, now or in the future, you might know both joy and grief. But let the joy take the lead in your life. Let Easter joy be the wind that actually moves along your little barque. Lift up your sagging shoulders, lift up your hands and your feet, and live according to Easter joy. It might be a joy that dwells at the same time with heaviness of heart because of your manifold trials, but the hope is the most true thing in your life, not the causes of your discouragement. Hope shall stand, and one day, through the grace and merits of Jesus Christ, your sorrows shall slip away. They do not

¹ A nice line from Carol's sermon for this day.

deserve so much power in your life, thanks to our resurrected Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.