

9 May 2012
Easter 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

Jesu Juva

“Living In-Between”

Text: John 16:16-22; Isaiah 40:25-31; 1 Peter 2:11-20

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

It's not easy being in-between. For example, when you're driving and the light turns yellow and you're not sure you should keep going and go through it, but you're also not sure you can stop in time - what do you do?

Being a teenager is another in-between time - you want to be treated as an adult, but too often you're treated like a child. You want to be independent, but you still need your parents. It's not easy.

The readings for today talk about being in-between.

The apostles are soon going to be stuck in-between Jesus' death and resurrection, and it will be a difficult time for them.

Then they are going to be in-between Jesus ascension and His coming again in glory. And again, it will be a difficult time for them.

But though the in-between times are difficult, there is, in the end, for the Christian, the promise of joy. A joy that no one will be able to take away.

It is like a woman giving birth, Jesus says. She is in-between - the child is coming out, but is not yet here. There is much pain and anguish . . . but in the end, only joy. The joy of her new baby. This new life which makes all the waiting and pain and anguish worth it.

The apostles would experience that joy on Easter, when the in-between time was over and Jesus came to them alive in His flesh and blood.

They would also experience that joy when they died, as martyrs, and were taken to be with their Lord in His heavenly kingdom.

Watching Jesus die, and suffering in their own deaths, wouldn't be easy. But the joy makes it all worth it. All the difficulties of the in-between times are forgotten in the joy of being with the Lord.

But it wasn't just the apostles. God's people in the Old Testament experienced many in-between times. When Isaiah talked about *mounting up with wings like eagles*, the people would have remembered one of those in-between times - the exodus. Moses spoke those same words to the people of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai - that the Lord had brought them up out of Egypt on eagle's wings. But they were not yet in the Promised Land.

They were in-between, and it would not be easy.

They would have many ups and downs, struggles and doubts and fears, and be disciplined by the Lord. But in the end, there would be joy. They would receive a land and a home of their own, and enjoy a time of rest and peace.

And so it is for you and me. We live in an in-between time.

We have been given the gift of eternal life, but still we face death.

The kingdom of heaven is ours, but we're not there yet.

In Holy Baptism God has made us His saints, and yet we're still sinners.

And it's not easy. We have many ups and downs, struggles and doubts and fears.

But we also have the promises of God to sustain us in this in-between time.

As Isaiah said: God knows. God sees. And as He has done in the past, protecting and preserving His people and bringing them through the in-between time, so He will do now and in the future.

Just as He brought His people out of their slavery in Egypt on eagle's wings, so He will bring us out of our slavery to sin.

And He did - as we continue to celebrate this Easter season - through the death and resurrection of His Son.

He is the one who grew faint and weary and died on the cross, but who then rose to life again, so that we who grow faint and weary and die in this in-between time, may rise to life again, too. With Him.

To the joy of everlasting life. His are the wings we will mount up on, and go to our heavenly home.

But not yet. Now, we're still in-between. We are, as Peter said in his epistle, sojourners and exiles. Like Israel. So live like it.

Live knowing that there is joy awaiting in the end; that you are not yet home.

Resist the temptations and passions of this world and life.

That's hard, but they're not our joy.

Be subject to those placed over us, for whether you like them or not, God is using them to help us through this in-between time. So honor them and give them the respect due them.

And, he says, do good to all. And if you suffer for it, so be it.
You know there is joy coming. The joy of our Lord's salvation.
A joy no one will be able to take away.

Now, some of that joy our Lord gives us here and now. It is not *all* in the future. Just as He comes into our time and space with His presence, so He brings us joy as well. The joy of faith.

The joy of receiving His forgiveness when we've messed up again and know we don't deserve it.

The joy of His provision when He supplies our needs and gives us friends and help and support in every time of need.

The joy when He feeds us with His own body and blood, giving us His very self, promising that He will be with us always, just as we will be with Him forever.

And sometimes that joy may come in surprising ways - but however it comes, it is always but a small foretaste of the joy to come. The joy that will come when this in-between time ends, and we receive all that God has for us.

So do not lose heart, though you grow faint and weary. Fight the good fight and struggle on.

Do not lose heart, though you suffer unjustly for doing good. Keep doing good, loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you.

Do not lose heart, though life get difficult and sorrowful. Your sorrow will turn to joy and your hearts will rejoice.

In-between never lasts forever. You too will mount up on wings like eagles, and see your Saviour, whom you now see by faith, with your own very resurrected eyes, and you will rejoice.

God is faithful, and He will do it.

For Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!] And so will you be. Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.