

Easter III Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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Every year, we all need to be reminded of the importance of making some simple and basic arrangements, in preparation for our death. I encourage you to consider your Will and your Funeral, because the Gospel of Easter - of Jesus' resurrection - encourages us, and gives us courage, to face our common mortality. We need no longer hide from death, in denial.

Our Lord himself had a will of sorts. Remember how one of his last acts on the cross was to provide for his mother after his death, commending her and John to each other's care. And Jesus was the beneficiary of Joseph's and Nicodemus' work in making arrangements for his burial, in a tomb which Joseph had prepared, and pre-hewn for himself.

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This is also a good time to be reminded to consider whether a planned gift to our Church, now or as part of our will, would be an appropriate expression of our faith and commitment.

Look unto Jesus; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.

The question we ask ourselves, perhaps not out loud, but privately, in the dark thoughts and feelings which we so often keep to ourselves, is this: Is it worth it? Is it all worth it all? We do wonder about that, the purposefulness and value of our efforts, our troubles, our sufferings, our disappointments and failures, our heartbreaks, our work, our sweat and blood, and life! Is it worth it? The disciples are sad and confused - sad at the thought of Jesus leaving them, and confused about how he explains what he means. You can, I think, hear the frustration and even anger in them, when they say, "We can't tell what he's talking about. What's all this stuff

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about now you see him, now you don't, and because I'm going back to my Father, and why does he keep saying a little while?"

Sorrow often leads to anger, especially when we are left sad and confused. Jesus' answer to this comes in terms of his insistent reassurance that our sorrows, our travails, are but for a little while. Our Lord's words, and his analogy of a woman in labour and the end and reward of that sorrow and pain, would assure us that it is worth it, that there is an end to our sorrow. The message of today's gospel reading is that your sorrow and pain are both but for a little while and worthwhile. But more than that, this is the Gospel of Easter. Our experience of the paschal mystery is exactly as Jesus says - one of sorrow turned into joy - and in our own lives, we know these Easters every time we find sorrow turned to joy, chiefly and most often in the experience of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name.

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The Gospel speaks to us about the purposefulness of suffering, of sorrow and trials, which have an end in the infinite time and love of God. We seek to follow Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross. This is the Easter perspective on our own Calvarys, that every sorrow is but the birth pang of new joy, because Jesus Christ has conquered all, and we follow him. The message today is that it is worthwhile, though now we may not see this clearly. We believe and we hope, and we are assured in Christ that all things work together for good. It is worthwhile, your moral struggles, the heartaches of working at your marriage, the short life of a child dying in infancy, the last days of a suffering patient, the sacrifices of our soldiers, the giving up of earthly pleasures, fighting a besetting sin, struggling against enormous injustice. It is all worthwhile because Jesus Christ has saved us all from futility, from meaninglessness and purposelessness, from death and the grave. Romans 8:18 says, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present

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time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

And 2 Corinthians 4.17 says, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Let us now not pretend that this is always, or even often, clear. It is a matter of hope, and hope that is seen is not hope. But we hope, that is we trust, that in Christ all things work together for good, that God who made nothing in vain, has redeemed all. But now we do have sorrow. But even in this we can still rejoice, for we know the joy in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, which no one can take from us.

That joy is the fruit of hope. That joy is to know Jesus Christ risen from the dead. We read in Psalm 16: “In thy presence is the fullness of joy.” To know Jesus with us always, the risen Christ in

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our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith, this is the fullness of joy.

Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

There are bold and broad promises there in that Gospel: your sorrow shall be turned into joy, I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. How many of us have claimed this promise of Jesus Christ, and how many of us have known in our lives this Easter pattern of sorrow and joy, a new fullness of joy, a joy in Christ which no one can take from us?

The message of Easter is that life, and suffering and sorrow, and service and sacrifice, are worthwhile in Jesus Christ. Surely this is a message our world and day have a desperate need to hear, and we, too, need to be renewed in that hopefulness. It is not blind optimism, which denies the reality of our sorrows and confusion.

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But our hopefulness comes from a faith in God, whose sovereignty and purpose, infinite power and love, we know supremely in Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection. We hope, even against all hope, in God who made everything out of nothing, and who raises the dead.

To him then, the maker and redeemer of all, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory for ever and ever.

Amen.