**John 16:23-33 May 22, 2022**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, John 16:23-33 here re-reading these words. “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Yesterday was Armed Forces Day, and as I was driving through Manistee these past few weeks seeing the signs up for Tight lines for troops coming back here in our area and seeing the Fish with the colors of the American Flag it made me reflect on what it means to serve, and what it means to care for someone so much that you call them your friend. Armed Forces Day is a day where we celebrate and honor those who are actively serving, and you can thank them for their present sacrifices and service. You can also think of the many reasons they do what they do in defense of our country, and recognize that their continued sacrifice is fueled by the bond they have with those who are next to them. The ones that they have grown to call friends, and even brothers and sisters. We talk about friendship here in the Church as well. Many beloved hymns talk about Jesus as our friend, the most famous being “What a Friend we have in Jesus”. And a Bible Verse that ties together this connection between serving and sacrificing for your comrade in battle, and the Easter season here in the Church where we celebrate Jesus dying and rising again from the dead for us, his beloved friends, is John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” To die for your friends is to be more than just acquaintances, it’s to even be greater than friends, it’s to be brothers and sisters in arms.

Friendship is a relationship we share together as believers in Jesus Christ, but it goes even deeper than that because we are truly united together and made brothers and sisters in Christ. A family relationship is different than a friendship. Not to take anything away from members of your family who are very special and unique in their own ways, but there’s something different and amazing about a very special and unique friend. When we come together for worship we are focused on Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, Lamb of God, Savior, Redeemer, Teacher, and Lord. While these names help us understand his work, our relationship to him is sometimes misunderstood. Just a few Sundays ago we saw Jesus revealed as the Good Shepherd of the sheep which is a wonderful imagery of his love and protection for us his beloved flock, but could be seen in a negative light to think that we are his property and he is our master. While it’s true that we belong to Jesus and are his own, we shouldn’t misunderstand this relationship to be how we treat or think of our own property in this world. We are more than that. We are special and unique to Christ. He laid down his life for us, and to make it even more personal he laid down his life for you. He knows you. He is your friend. We know this from his own words in the continuation of John chapter 15: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” We gathered here together, are more than just individuals living in the same part of the world. We are united with Christ, as his own, and his friends.

So what does it mean to be friends? Well, like anything in life there are two different extremes when it comes to the things that we have, and the people that we know. We have had the good and the bad in many different experiences and things. Good bars, bad cars, good meals, bad meals, good days, and bad days. It’s the same, but the outcome is different. I’m sure the same can be said for your friends. Not all friendships are healthy relationships. This really comes down to what each friend is bringing to the overall relationship, and it helps us understand what good friends do for each other. A friend is someone you can “cast your burdens upon and be sustained by.” Even though you may be in anguish and terror, a friend is the someone who hears your call and saves you. A friend is someone who listens, who helps, who can overcome situations that are outside of the control of a fellow friend who has been overwhelmed. That’s a hard thing to be for each other in this world, because as Jesus himself states in our Gospel lesson, we will face tribulation. Last week we studied how we would face sorrow and it would be turned into joy. Here John continues that message by not only pointing to the disciples abandoning him, but ultimately the entire world is something that must be overcome.

Hopefully God has blessed you with strong friendships in your life. Perhaps you can think of a friend or partner that compliments you very well, whether it’s a friend you met in life, or your spouse, or even a family member. No matter who it is I’m sure you’ve faced things together and made your way through. But I’m afraid only one friend will help you in the struggles that Jesus describes for us this morning. No matter how strong you are or how great a friend you have we cannot overcome the world by ourselves. The world is after all, a sorrowful place. The world is more than just a place of temporary sorrow and a few bad days, it is a place of destruction. A place where relationships and friendships aren’t always good, but where even the most beloved friends can betray and hurt each other. That’s because our relationships are as defiled with sin as our bodies are, and as our world is. Even the great and noble disciples are called out by Jesus for what sort of friends they will be. “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.”

If you are a guest or visitor who hasn’t ever come to Church before, or even if you are a lifelong member of this church my guess is there have been times in your life where you’ve wondered why such bad things happen in a world of such good people. So let me speak about that. The truth is that we live in a bad world. A world that was created perfect but that ultimately was defiled by sin. Sin that we are responsible for, we as the highest point of God’s creation. Sin that we are guilty of committing and therefore implicating ourselves and revealing ourselves to not be great, but instead to be the worst of sinners. For all have sinned, no one can claim otherwise, and so the world is filled with sinners. We all gathered here today, are sinners, whether we are used to coming here, or have come through these doors for the first time. This is not a Church that exists only for the perfect or sinless, the good or righteous, it is a place that exists for sinners.

Our sin is revealed to us in the Word of God that we study, are taught, and hear preached. It’s again why the focus of our time here isn’t on ourselves but ultimately is on Jesus Christ. Jesus more than some impersonal, undefined, source of goodness, no Jesus is your personal friend. The one who came here and promises that “whatever we ask of the Father in his name, we will be given.” meaning that we are in fellowship with the Father and receive the one thing we need more than anything else; eternal life. The one who promises us peace on account of what He has done. On account of his work on our behalf we don’t have to fear this horrible and sinful world that we live in. It doesn’t have to be something that drives us into depression or sadness every day of our lives. For Jesus encourages us by saying “Take heart; I have overcome the world” His overcoming of the world of sin all around us is shown in his love for us, his friends, by showing us what love truly is. Again, hear these words and meditate upon how they relate to you personally, a personal friend of Jesus Christ, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his….friends.” Here, gathered together this morning, is a family of believers and a group of friends. Friends that may not know everything about the person sitting next to them, but friends that are united in their ultimate and best friend Jesus Christ. The one who took upon himself, your sin, and your shame, your selfishness, and your imperfection. Who took upon himself your debt of death, and who paid that price with his own precious blood. The one who came and overcame a world that was set against God from the moment of man’s rebellion, and who ultimately won, what we are celebrating this joyous Easter season, eternal life and fellowship with God our Heavenly Father. Now we see it clearly, that the Father will take us to be with Him, until he makes the world into a new creation on the day that Jesus returns.

If you want a picture of that perfection, read again our Second Reading from Revelation chapter 21. There we hear about the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The place where the gates are made of pearl, where the streets are pure gold and transparent glass. Where there is no darkness or sadness but only light. It’s an amazing picture of the world that we will live in someday, and we have peace in our hearts knowing that we will go there, not by the works of our own hands, and not by the righteousness or perfection that we obtain on our own, but only through the work of Jesus Christ. The one who would even call us, we sinners who have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb, his friends.

I pray that the friendships in your life would grow from this day forward as we find support and happiness together as Brothers and Sisters in Christ. That we join in a time of fellowship and celebration here in God’s house as the Divine serves us His Word and holy Sacrament for the forgiveness of our sins. As we go forward back into a world of sin may we find comfort in Christ’s overcoming of the world and it’s sorrow, and find joy ultimately in the truth that we have a friend in the Savior of the world, and the very Son of God.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.