

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Congregation: Amen.]

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*Congregation: He is risen indeed!*] [*All: Alleluia!*]

And yet, dearly beloved by the Lord, before Christ arose that glorious Third Day, before He was buried, before He was crucified, before He was delivered over, indeed, before He was even betrayed, Jesus spoke to His Disciples. Yet He did not speak of these things, not yet.

Instead, He speaks of what has already taken hold of them. **“Sorrow has filled your heart.”** Filled it: as smoke fills a darkened room.

And the reason? He was going away.

Earlier that same evening, He had implied as much, saying, **“I go to prepare a place for you.”**¹ And before that, **“Where I am going you cannot follow Me; [not] now.”**² Each time, more troubling than the last; each time, sorrow penetrated a bit further into their hearts. And now, as the hour drew ever near, He says, plainly, **“I go away to Him who sent Me.”** **“And none of you,”** He observes, **“asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ”**

Oh, but they had asked. Peter had asked,³ as had Thomas.⁴ Yet each time they asked, the answer was not quite an answer, so that, at last, they stopped asking altogether. The sorrow was too great. What was the use of asking? And so, they sat in silence.

You know this silence. You know what it is to have asked and not received, to have knocked and heard no answer, to have prayed the same prayer so many times that the words grow hollow and emptied of their urgency. You know what it is to need Him precisely when He seems most absent, to have cried out in the dark and been met with... not cruelty, not even refusal; no, only silence: the kind that is worse than a no, the kind that makes you wonder whether the asking is worth asking at all.

The Disciples stopped asking. They sat in silence, in sorrow. And you have done the same. There are prayers you no longer pray: not from loss of belief, rather because the asking itself became too painful, and silence felt safer than hope disappointed again. There are things you once brought to Him that you now carry alone, because you cannot bear to lay them down again, only to return and find them still there. **Sorrow has filled your heart.** Filled it: as smoke fills a darkened room.

And into that fullness, into that silence, He speaks. **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away.”**

Advantage? What **advantage** is there in the going of the One upon whom everything depends? What **advantage** is there in the silence that has already begun to settle, in the sorrow that has already taken hold? The Disciples cannot say; they have stopped asking. And Jesus does not press them for an answer, because He knows they cannot give one. They cannot see what His going away will accomplish; they can only sense it approaching: the weight of something that, once it comes, will change everything, and there is nothing to be done about it.

And you have sat in that same place. Not on that particular night; yet on your own dark nights, in your own silences. You’ve sat there: where “advantage” was hardly the word you would use to describe what was happening; where you could not see past the trouble to what God might be doing in it; where only absence and heartache sat with you as sorrow filled your heart so completely that there was no room for anything else. You’ve sat there. You may be sitting there even now.

Jesus does not rebuke you for it. He does not demand that you understand the **advantage** before He gives it to you. The advantage is what He is about to go and do, and He will go and do it whether

you can understand it or not, whether you can bear it or not, whether you are asking or sitting in silence.

He is not speaking as one who does not know what lies ahead; He is speaking from the other side of what He is about to do. He is going away: by way of the garden, by way of the arrest, by way of the Cross. He goes into betrayal, into the hands of the chief priests, into the judgment hall of Pilate, unto **the Place of a Skull**,⁵ and into death itself. He goes to all of that; He goes away: because your salvation requires it. The sorrow of that hour, the darkness of that death, must be His and not yours.

“For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” His going away is the condition of that coming. And what comes, or more precisely, who comes in His going away is **the Spirit of truth**, the Comforter,⁶ the One who **will take what is [the Lord Jesus’] and declare it to you**. Namely: the forgiveness Christ won on the Cross, the righteousness He earned in that perfect life laid down, and the life that burst from the tomb on the Third Day. None of it reaches you without His going away. All of it comes to you through it.

And so the unanswered prayers, the silence, the absences and heartbreaks that have filled you with sorrow: consider what may be happening in them. Not that God has forgotten you. Not that your cry has gone unheard. Rather, He works in the going away, in the dark, in the silence from which no prayer seems to escape. Jesus worked that way once, definitively, on the Cross. He works that way still. The darkness has not overcome Him. The silence is not indifference. He who went away into death for you has not stopped entering the dark places, even yours.

You cannot see what He is doing in it, not yet. You cannot bear it now, as He Himself says to the Disciples here. Sorrow fills the darkness, sorrow which threatens to choke off your prayers. Nevertheless, He bids that you not stop asking, even when the asking feels useless, that you not seal yourself off from Him who speaks into silence.

For into that silence, He has not left you without His Word. The Comforter has come, **the Spirit of truth, who [takes] what is [Christ’s] and [declares] it to you**. He preaches the Cross as your **advantage**, Christ’s death as your life, and His going away as the precondition of His coming to you here, now, in this place. The Spirit comes, not to explain the silence or to make the hard things easy. He comes to give you Christ—His righteousness, His forgiveness, His Body and Blood—in the midst of sorrow, not after it has passed.

And so here, at this altar, the One who went away comes back. Not yet in glory; that Day is coming, and when it comes, sorrow will be turned into everlasting joy. Now, He comes in the way He has appointed: with His body and blood—in, with, and under bread and wine—given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins. The **advantage** of His going away is given to you here, in your mouth, on your lips, into your body. He does not come to take away the sorrow or lift the darkness. He comes into it. He gives you Himself: He, who went into it, through it, and out the other side; He, who is not finished giving Himself to you.

Sorrow has filled your heart. O, Beloved, He knows. He has not gone away from that. He has gone away into it, for you. Now, He comes back to you, as He promised, by the Spirit, in His Word, at this table.

Come: receive the **advantage** of His going away.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*Congregation: He is risen indeed!*] [*All: Alleluia!*]

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. [*Congregation: Amen.*]

¹ John 14:2d

² John 13:36d

³ See John 13:36a-b and 37.

⁴ See John 14:5.

⁵ John 19:17b

⁶ The word Jesus uses to describe the Holy Spirit here is παράκλητος /pa.ra.klay.tos/, which has been translated in various ways. παράκλητος can mean, “one who is called to someone’s aid,” “advocate,” “comforter,” or “one who appears in another’s behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper.” Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. p. 766, s.v. “παράκλητος.” The NKJV, ESV, and NASB render παράκλητος as “Helper,” the NIV renders it as “Counselor,” and the KJV renders it as “Comforter.”

Nota Bene: Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture contained or inferred within this sermon is from the New King James Version.
The Scripture on the front is from the English Standard Version.