

IN A LITTLE WHILE...

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
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Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?"
John 16:17

Do you like riddles? Riddles can be fun but also challenging. . Let's try one. What is it? Someone makes it, but has no need of it? Someone buys it, but does not use it? Someone uses it, but can neither see it or feel it? What is it? It's a coffin!

Did you find that puzzling? The people that make coffins sell them to funeral homes. The homes that buy them don't plan to personally use them. The people put in them can neither see them nor feel them.

Likewise, the disciples were puzzled by the words Jesus spoke to them in our Gospel reading for this day. He said, "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." He could have added a third one: "another little while, and you will see me no longer".

We are in the 5th Sunday of Easter, but this text comes from Maundy Thursday night. It is easier for us to understand by looking back. The first "in a little while" meant that on the very next day Jesus would go to his death. The disciples would see him beaten, hanging on a cross, dead, and then see him no longer as the grave door was shut.

Now Jesus had earlier told the disciples that his departure was for their benefit, but they seemed either unwilling or unable to grasp that. It left them full of sorrow, afraid, and with lives filled with despair. They did not realize that Jesus' death was necessary for their redemption and the gift of eternal life, did they? Don't be too hard on them. How often in our own lives, when things go wrong, do we not fully trust in our great God who can bring good out of even the worst of situations?

But "again a little while" would be just three days later. Jesus had descended into hell to declare his victory over Satan and had risen victorious from the dead. Soon the disciples and hundreds of others saw him again! Their defeated, despairing lives were filled with joy at his victory over death.

But remember this: that following his resurrection, just about 40 days after Easter, there would be another "little while". His disciples would not see him, as Jesus would return to his Father in his ascension.

Our text tells us that some of his disciples kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." Jesus knew that and so he said, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me? I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will be turned to joy.'"

Our Lord also used the example of a woman giving birth to a child. A mother usually has some pain and discomfort when the time has come, but when her baby is born, she can usually forget about the anguish and any hard labor. That is because her anguish has been replaced with joy because a precious child has been born into the world.

These words of Jesus have significance for us today. We, too, have “little whiles” in our lifetime. We have times when things are not going as well as we think they should, or maybe the bottom seems to have fallen out of our life and things are really going badly. This happened to the disciples and in all likelihood will happen to many of us. Note what Jesus added: “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

William Frey, a retired Episcopal bishop from Colorado, tells the following story: “When I was a younger man, I volunteered to read to a degree student named John who was blind. One day I asked him, ‘How did you lose your sight?’ ”

“A chemical explosion,” John said, “at the age of thirteen.”

“How did that make you feel?” I asked. “Life was over,” he replied. “I felt helpless. I hated God. For the first six months I did nothing to improve my lot in life. I would eat all my meals alone in my room. One day my father entered the room and said, ‘John, the winter is coming and the storm windows need to be up—that’s your job. I want those hung by the time I get back this evening or else!’”

“He then turned and walked out of the room and slammed the door. I got so angry. I thought, ‘Who does he think I am? I’m blind!’ I was so angry I decided to do it. I felt my way to the garage. I found the windows, located the necessary tools, found the ladder, all the while muttering under my breath, ‘I’ll show them! I’ll fall, then they will have a blind AND paralyzed son!’”

“I got the windows up. I found out later that never at any moment was my father more than four or five feet away from my side.”

You see, another benefit of the resurrection speaks to us today. Whatever you go through, wherever you are, whatever task God calls you to undertake, whatever heartbreaks you suffer, because Jesus is alive—he is never at any moment away from your side.

I am sure the disciples were disappointed when Jesus left them to ascend into heaven. We sometimes have trouble fully understanding why the Lord does the things that he does. But it wasn’t going to make all that much difference. He told them and he tells us, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Our joys on this earth are often fleeting. But “in a little while” that will no longer be so. John 16:22 tells us also this morning. “So with you: now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

With Jesus as our partner, our friend and our companion, we live out our life on this earth and trust in him to finally take us to a much better place, to a life that never ends but is the best we can possibly have. We have had our failures; we have not always had the right priorities; but God loves us and has chosen us as his children to enjoy his presence and rewards of eternal life forever. Our destiny is not based on how many successes we have had, but on the victory over death won by Jesus Christ. So we say again this morning, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. ” Amen.

