

John 16:12-22

Easter 5C + May 19, 2019 + Confirmation Sunday
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
A Little While

The Word of the Lord from John 16:16: Jesus said, "A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

"A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me." It's a simple sentence with small words and an easy structure, but the disciples can't figure it out. We shouldn't judge too harshly, because they're trying to process the unbelievable through a haze of grief. This is the Last Supper, as somber a meal as you will find. In less than 24 hours, Jesus will be hanging dead on a cross – in a little while, He'll be in the tomb. And, although His dying is more torturous and violent than most, death is the way of all flesh.

Then He says, "In a little while, you will see Me." He's told them before that He'll rise again, but that's the part that remains unbelievable to them. To be fair, people don't rise from the dead every day; and as Jesus Himself points out, their hearts are overwhelmed with sorrow.

But even though they are puzzled and sorrowful and doubtful, Jesus is still Jesus. While they fear and grieve and despair, He goes to the cross to conquer sin. He rises again on the third day; and while the time in between may seem an eternity, He is seen by His disciples after just a little while.

For the next forty days, it's sort of the pattern: Jesus appears to His disciples and then He is unseen again. Then He ascends into heaven, but not without the promise that He will return in glory on the Last Day. That's when His words to His disciples (you included!) will be ultimately, fully fulfilled: "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

It's been two thousand years since the Ascension; and for those of us with mortal flesh that can't even eke out a century, that's a long time. Bear in mind, however, that to the Lord a thousand years is like a day and a day is like a thousand years; and so this time has only been a little while.

In this little while until the Lord returns, He does not leave His people to fend for themselves. Hear what He promises His disciples: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you."

Mark what Jesus says about sending the Holy Spirit: "He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you." He will *declare* it because He works through the Word; and when He works through the Word, the Word does what it says. Therefore, when the Spirit takes what belongs to the Son and declares it to you, He's not just telling you about it: He's giving it to you.

And what belongs to Jesus? Forgiveness, life and salvation. Victory over death and the devil. The kingdom of heaven.

Until Jesus returns visibly on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead, the Holy Spirit is at work to give you all that is His; and as He gives you what belongs to both the Father and the Son, the entire Holy Trinity is in on the giving.

So, for instance, the Holy Spirit was hard at work to give the gifts of Father and Son in 2004 on July 19, August 1 and November 21; and again in 2005 on January 2 and April 17; and again in 2006 on May 21 and June 11. On those days, just a little while ago, the Holy Trinity repeatedly intervened in this creation and spoke to individual infants. Infants! He gave priceless gifts to babies named Brayden, Grace and Zachary; Joseph and Bailee; Alyssa and Lucy. He said, "Hey, baby. Today, I give you all the gifts that Jesus died and rose to give. Today, I guide you into all truth. Today, I wrap you in Christ's righteousness and the Father's favor. Today, I give you everlasting life."

Truthfully, the Holy Spirit didn't say, "Hey, baby." Through the mouth of a pastor here or elsewhere, He said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Today, Confirmation Sunday, we rejoice that the Holy Spirit who called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified them has also kept them in the true faith; and on this day, they publicly confess that faith – they confess the truth into which the Holy Spirit has guided and kept them. Not only that, but even as we rejoice in their response to God's grace this day, we also rejoice in the Lord's further giving to them. Although the Lord Jesus remains unseen until the Last Day, it does not mean that He is not here. Indeed, He is present with His people in His Word and Sacraments: and today, He draws near to our confirmands to give them even His body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins.

The time between their baptism and their confirmation day has been around 13-15 years. If we were to ask their parents about the time in between, I'm betting they'd say that, although some of the days were long, the years have gone by quickly. In other words, those years have only been a little while; and you know that, as you advance in years, time does not slow down.

In other words, your life is but a little while. But the hope that you have is not that you can gut it out for that long. Rather, it's that – though unseen – the Lord is a very present help in times of trouble.

So, unless the Lord returns quickly, I say this to our confirmands today, and I say this to all.

In this little while, you will be sorrowful. You will weep and lament. I do not know the exact cause for your weeping, but sorrow and weeping cannot be avoided in a world that is cursed with sin; and part of the curse of grief is that it slows time to a crawl to make you think that the Lord isn't listening anymore.

In this little while, the world will rejoice in ungodly things. That's pretty standard fare these days. As the world delights to push this or that practice that violates God's Word – and scorns the Lord's Church in the process for being so backwards, this little time is a tough time because you're going to want to fit in with the crowd.

In this little while, your flesh will tempt you. I don't claim to know what the temptation will be: sex, power, jealousy, pride, grudges. But whatever the temptation, it will be your sinful flesh goading you that you don't have much time because you only live once, so you'd better make the most of it by doing what you want to do.

In this little while, you'll be aware of how quickly time is flying by, how much you want to do, and how little time you have to do it. When weekends fly by so quickly, you'll be tempted to place those things above the Lord's presence here for you.

In this little while, flesh will betray you. It might be others, friends and family who disappoint you, hurt you, leave you; and at such times, a little while feels again like a long, lonely while. It might be your own flesh that develops an unwelcome diagnosis, in which case this little while may seem all too short.

In this little while, you will be tempted to say that it is too hard to live by faith. Devil, world and sinful flesh want to grind you down.

In other words, throughout this little while of life, the devil will do his best to get you to leave Jesus behind. He will work at this frantically because he knows that his days are numbered and he's running out of time, because he's already been defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He's already on a leash, and it's only a matter of time – a little time – until he's done. He only has a little while to persuade you to join him in everlasting lostness and eternal death.

Never forget that the reason he harasses you so much is that you already have eternal life: you're baptized, remember?

And throughout this little while, while the Lord is unseen, He is not far away. He is as near to you as His Word.

Where it is given to you to weep and lament, He is your comfort and your help.

Where it is given to you to stand against an ungodly world, He is your strength and your stay.

Where your own flesh tempts you, He is your courage against temptation and your forgiveness should you fall.

Where your own flesh weakens, His grace is sufficient for you and His power is made perfect in weakness.

Where others betray you, He knows full well what it means to be betrayed and He promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Where you are ground down, He will carry you and lift you up again.

At times, the Lord's work will be memorable; and you can look back and see what the Lord has done. But He is never far away. He is as near as His Word, as near as His Supper; and so the Holy Spirit works continually to glorify Jesus by giving Him to you and guiding you to Him. What wonder is this! The almighty God did not just visit you once at the font, although that would be a priceless honor all by itself; but in every absolution, every proclamation of the Word, the Lord visits you to forgive, strengthen your faith and renew His gift of eternal life. With every Supper, the Lord Jesus Himself draws near to say, "Here I am for you."

This life goes fast enough, with joys and sorrows both. Joys go all too fast, while sorrows tend to linger. No matter how fast time seems to go, this life is just a little while. But after that, for you comes the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. And there, for you, the promise is fulfilled: not only will Jesus see you, but you will see Him in glory. On that day, in just a little while, your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen