

4th Midweek Lenten Sermon – 03/15/23

Text – John 16:5-33

Theme – “A Little While”

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

“In a little while you will NOT see Me, and then a little while and you WILL see Me.”

Riddles and puzzles. That’s what Jesus’ words seemed to be to the disciples. What does that even mean, Jesus? What are You talking about? How long is a “little while”? Why will we NOT see You, and then see You again?

Jesus has a habit of speaking in ways that no one really understood. How many of the parables went right over the heads, not just of the crowds, but even of the Twelve? How many times did Jesus tell the apostles what His mission and purpose was, and yet they were so oblivious? How often had He predicted His arrest, His conviction, His death, and His resurrection? And yet, when each event happens, the disciples are dumbfounded.

It is the same thing here, in our text tonight. Jesus says in a *“little while”* they will not see Him (which *we* know to be a reference to His death and burial, the three days of Good Friday/Holy Saturday/Easter) and then a *“little while”* and they WILL see Him again (which, clearly, is Easter and His appearances to them for 40 days, until Ascension). But they don’t understand Him. At all. It must have been rather frustrating to Jesus. But, I am sure, we also frustrate Him more than a little, with our own lack of understanding. With our stumbles into sin. With our failure to trust Him.

So, as Jesus explains – again – to the Twelve what is about to happen, remember He is also speaking to us tonight. (pause)

“I am going away to Him who sent Me, and yet none of you asks: ‘Where are You going?’” Jesus knows exactly what is about to happen. He knows the events of Maundy Thursday in Gethsemane; the overnight hours in the high priest’s house and Pilate’s judgment hall and Herod’s palace; Good Friday’s rejection and crucifixion. He knows how literally everyone will line up against Him – betraying, denying, deserting, forsaking Him. He knows the terrible price He will have to pay, as He suffers our hell for us. He knows it all. But rather than dwell on THAT, Jesus speaks of going to His Father.

Yes, the pain and suffering and anguish of these hours is immense — unimaginable, really. Yet Jesus chooses to look past that. To His going to be with His Father. To the joy of accomplishing the mission, the work, His Father has sent Him to do. To the exaltation which belong to Him as God, as He rules heaven and earth. He is going to His Father – and that is pure joy. Even if there is literally hell to pay first.

There’s a great lesson there for us, isn’t there? Now, I am not in ANY way comparing our struggles, our suffering, our pain, our persecution to that of Christ. There is just no way we could ever make the claim that what we go through rivals His. I mean, have we ever had anyone (much less kings, a governor, and a high priest) seeking our death? Have we ever had the entire population of a city calling for our execution? Have we ever had to wrestle with the devil as Jesus did – in the wilderness, at Gethsemane, and at the cross? What’s the worst we have ever had to endure? Some name-calling, sure. Maybe some overt religious bigotry and hatred. And, yeah, the devil comes after us too. But, come on. There is a world of difference between our suffering and that of Christ.

Yet, we DO suffer. And when that happens, it is good for us to remember how our Lord Jesus focused — not on the suffering — but on the goal. On being with the Father. So, when

things get tough, when Satan charges after us, when physical pain (even death) stare us in the face, we can do as Jesus did: we can look past it all, to what lies ahead. Because you have been joined to Christ, you know His Father is YOUR Father. And when everything else is taken away, **He** remains. When this life ends, you go to be with the Father. Forever. To enjoy a life infinitely greater and more wonderful than even this one. (pause)

“A little while and you will not see Me...” Now, WE know what Jesus means here: He is talking about how that same night He would be taken from them in Gethsemane, put on trial, and crucified. And the Twelve would not see Him for a while. Because, when all that happened, they ran away. They deserted their Lord. They hid. And all that just a couple of hours after they had all boasted that they would fight an army for Him! That, even if the others all fell away, THEY never would.

Well, there are times when we too do not see Jesus. And almost never it is because HE hides from us, but because we turn aside and hide from Him. We do that when things get bad – when we have to suffer, when the world attacks us, when our frail human nature wants to sin. We see the vast powers arrayed against us – and they ARE mighty and scary: the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh – and we scurry away to hide. We fail to trust our Lord to do as He promises, to protect and defend and deliver us. And instead we despair, we cower, we flee, we betray and deny and desert Him. You know it’s true. None of us can say otherwise. We take our eyes off of Christ and instead focus on whatever trouble the devil puts up against us. And that is not Jesus’ fault; that is ours.

But it is also true when things go well for us, isn’t it? I mean, when everything seems to be good — when our wife loves us, the kids listen to us, the boss promotes us; when our sports teams are winning and the weather is just right and our tax return is better than we had even

hoped; when the doctor says we DON'T have cancer, or we passed the test we had feared; or we can finally afford that new car -- when such things happen, then we also have a tendency to lose sight of Jesus. When we don't have pressing, threatening, frightening problems then we start to think we can handle life ourselves. We make idols out of the treasures and joys God gives us. We forget that we are miserable, damnable sinners because this life is just so pleasant and good that we don't think of eternity.

A little while and we don't see Jesus. It happens. To all of us. And we need to constantly, continually, always be on guard against it. But when it does happen (as it surely will, weak sinners that we are), we need to listen to what Jesus says next: “...and a little while and you *WILL* see Me”.

It's not that Jesus pops in and out, that sometimes He is here with us and then He is not. No, He ALWAYS remains. He ALWAYS calls us to Himself. He ALWAYS wants to help and save and forgive us. So, when it happens that we DON'T see Him, we need to remember He is still there. To hear Him, as He calls us back. To have Him open our eyes and refocus us where we need to be: in Him.

And how? Simple. It is the **Gospel** which opens our eyes, which brings us back to Him, which gives us the forgiveness and spiritual strength we need. The Gospel. The Good News that He has taken all sin – OUR sin – onto Himself. He has suffered for it. And so, when Satan tries to get us to give up in fear OR when the devil tries to seduce us with the joys of this life, we know that healing and joy are really only to be found in our Lord. In the reconciliation, the reunion, He has made for us with God. In the new heaven and earth – the only truly perfect world we will ever know – which is ours in Him.

Keep your eyes on Jesus, and it WILL all be good. But only then. (pause)

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” How soon that would all come to pass for the Twelve! When Jesus is taken from them, when He is tried, when He is convicted, when He is sentenced, when He is scourged and beaten and crowned with thorns, when He is rejected and mocked, when He is nailed to the cross to die – then they certainly DID weep and lament. For Jesus, yes. But also for themselves. Why was all this happening? What did it mean? Had they been wrong all along? Was Jesus NOT the Savior? Was God against them?

We have days like that too. We wonder why God lets His Church suffer. Why His children are persecuted and killed. Why bad things happen to our loved ones -- and, most of all, to us. Days when Satan whispers in our ears that God does not care, or that He has rejected us, or that we are too wicked and evil, or that God is too high and exalted to be bothered with the likes of us. Days when we feel sorry for ourselves. When we grumble and complain. When our faith is shaken to its very core and foundation.

So, what did Jesus tell the Twelve when all that was about to happen to them? He comforts them with the promise that God DOES care, that He will NEVER forsake them, that He will ALWAYS rescue them. That He will turn their sorrow into joy. The clearest, most obvious instance of that is Easter. How that changes their sorrow into joy! Jesus lives! He rises, the Victor over all sin, over death and the grave, even over Satan himself! God DOES know what He is doing, all along. It was all part of His good and gracious plan. He takes evil and makes it good for His children.

And so it is for you too. Are you sad and sorrowful? Are you carrying a crushing load: maybe of physical suffering, or spiritual anguish, or worry over what is happening in our world? Well, God promises that He will turn all that sorrow and pain into joy! Everlasting joy.

Not that God will necessarily take away all that immediately – for perhaps His plan and purpose is that you will have to bear it for a while. But someday, it WILL be gone. Over. Finished. Someday you will have perfect peace and joy and life. He gives us a taste of it now, doesn't He? He gives us so much in this life that is good and wonderful – so, how great will it be THEN? He feeds and clothes and shelters us. He gives us family and friends. He gives us little glimpses, here and there.

But, best of all, He gives us the joy of forgiveness. He gives us our Christian family. He gives us our spiritual home. He feeds us with the Word and Sacraments. He fills us with His Spirit and life. He comforts us as only our Father can. And, in His promises, we have our sorrow turned to joy, even now in the midst of this world's suffering. You are God's child. Nothing and no one can take that away from you. And so we have peace. (pause)

“I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.” How the disciples clung to those words, especially in the three days to come, until they saw their Lord again Easter evening! We, too, cling to those words, to that promise, until we see Him face-to-face, in glory and joy everlasting. Our Lord conquers, and so will we. And THAT gives us hope until that day finally comes. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Hymn – *“To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All”* (LSB #613)