

Sermon, April 24, 2016 - Easter 5

“In a Little While”

John 16:12–22



Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Here is a question for you, a riddle really: What occurs once every minute, twice in every moment, yet never in a thousand years? Does anybody know? The answer: the letter m.

Riddles are fun, aren't they? I think that most of us are familiar with riddles. We use them with our friends, family, and at social events, and even for teaching as Jesus is doing in the Gospel reading for today where He said: “A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” A riddle the disciples did not get at first, they said: “What does He mean by ‘a little while’?”

This is the theme of our meditation this morning, “In a Little While” based on the Gospel reading for today.

Riddles can be fun, but they can also be confusing. Let's try another. “Who makes it, has no need of it. Who buys it, does not use it. Who uses it, can neither see it nor feel it. What is it?” Mmm!?

What is it? Some of you might know the answer, but most of us, are scratching our heads, like mmmm.... What is it? That's how the disciples to Jesus' words: “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me”

Now, having read the rest of the text and some more of the Scriptures, we look back and we can say that we know what Jesus was referring to; we know the answer to the riddle, but then again, maybe not so much. Maybe it is still a riddle! “In a little while . . . and again a little while.” Maybe, this riddle has three answers to it and some interesting lessons that happen in between, and that's what I would like to talk about this morning.

The first answer to the riddle is course, Jesus' momentary separation from His disciples during the next few days after He spoke those words.

It was Maundy Thursday, right when Jesus is having the Passover meal with his disciples, there at the table, he tells them “in a little while” you will not see me.

We know what happened in that “little while.” That same evening he was arrested and right the next day he dies, he is taken away from the disciples. Not a good time that was, sad, painful, but, Jesus said “...your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

The separation was going to be necessary because at his return he will bring back a new life, salvation, heaven, and that will make their hearts rejoice and because he is victorious he will make sure no one will take their joy away.

Then in a little while the disciples will have another chance to be with him, before he ascended to heaven. Yes at his rising again from the grave Jesus was a little while with them before he ascended to heaven.

But in the meantime, the disciples will see him beaten, hanging on a cross, dead—and then see him no longer when the grave door slams shut. Although Jesus

had earlier told the disciples this departure was for their benefit, the disciples are completely unable to grasp what was happening, at least for now. They don't realize Jesus' death will be their redemption, life, salvation. Instead they have been thinking that having him visibly present was the whole point—you know, having a teacher, leader, and who knows, maybe following Jesus was their ticket to fame and fortune.

Now, what happens when not understanding all this brings? Well in a little while they will mourn deeply (v 20a). Yes, the disciples found themselves at a loss, for their Master, their Teacher and Savior was taking away, momentarily that is, but for them it seemed forever. Everything came to nothing!

But with the Savior is not so, the good news is that “again a little while” it will be the third day. It will be Easter! Christ will be reunited with them and will rejoice greatly. After Jesus had descended into hell to declare his victory over Satan (16:11), he will rise again victorious. And he will bring to his almost dead and despairing disciples a new life which will turn their sorrow into joy (vv 20b–22).

It is the same joy that today is given to you, it is the same life that the Lord brings to your almost dead and despairing hearts, it is the same joy that comforts and heals your aching heart.... In a little while Jesus won all of that for you on the Cross of Calvary.

The second answer to the riddle refers to not three days but forty days. Forty days after Jesus resurrected from the dead.

The disciples did get to see Jesus and their joy was complete at his resurrection. And what Jesus had spoken to them also made sense, the confusion was lifted of their minds and hearts. Now the risen Christ is again with them, but again, for “a little while” for that reunion between Jesus and his disciples will come to an end, just as our Easter season here today, will come to an end in a couple more weeks.

Forty days after Easter, Jesus would return to his Father in his ascension, and again in a little while the disciples would not see him. But this departure Jesus had said was for their benefit, because his departure will now open the door for the Holy Spirit who will come in “a little while” and stay with us, to do his work in the new lives of these first disciples and all who would come after them.

In another “little while” the Spirit of truth will take what Jesus received from the Father and declare it to the disciples (14:26). The disciples were confused at the riddle first, yet “in a little while” they will have the clarity of God's purpose and the answer to the riddle for the Holy Spirit will come and make to them the things that had happened and the reasons, thus making their joy complete for their understanding of all what Jesus taught them in the past was going to make sense, and come to the realization that the choice of following Jesus was the right choice.

That's the second answer to the riddle, the time Jesus spent with these disciples after his resurrection, until he comes again at the end of time, or until he takes you to be with him at your death. But until his second coming, there is another “little while...”

But I think there is another answer to the riddle. One that involves you and I; one that involves the time we have on this side of eternity. After all our life time here on earth, no matter the length of it, in God's sight is like a “little while” as well, isn't it!?

The question is what are we to do with that little while, how are going to invest or use the “little while” we have.

For starters, we need to see, with desperation, the need for a Savior, the need to see Jesus for the redemption, life, and salvation only he brings. We need the forgiveness of our sins and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. We need the new life Christ brings. We need to look for the new life he brings and hold on to that life. The New life we have received, the new life we do receive in the water of Holy Baptism and in God's holy meal.

But is also an answer that calls us to action. Jesus warned his disciples that life wasn't going to be easy or peaceful during that "little while." In fact he compared that "little while" to the pains of giving birth. Not easy at all! "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful," Jesus said. Not good news is it. Not good news at all! Being Christian, being a disciple of Christ in today's age, is not easy. Add to that our own human struggles, our frustrations, our sickness, our weakness, or our own attitudes as well, all of those things don't make things easier for us being Christians in today's age, or at any time for that matter.

Therefore Jesus says, we need to tune in to the Holy Spirit, for he will guide us in all truth. And more, he will give us what is Jesus': His life, his love, his forgiveness, and his care, but also his empowering desire to act all together in unity and care for one another.

We do need each other, don't we? Shortly after Jesus said in "a little while, and you will not see me," what did disciples do? They run, each in his own direction. But that just complicated things for them, made it more difficult to bear Jesus absence. Only after they came together in prayer and mutual consolation and care that begun to bear the load of Jesus absence. It was in their midst that the risen Lord appeared to them, and it was in their midst as they were gathered with one another that the Holy Spirit came upon them.

We need each other dear friends, in this "little while." Let us not take that for granted, but in fact and intentionally with on Jesus second coming together, for mutual encouragement and uplifting when times get difficult. Then after a "little while" see him face to face in heaven forever!

But in the meantime in this "little while" let it be said of you and me: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29), because we have not seen the Lord's scarred hands and feet with our eyes, have we? But, we have certainly, seen them by faith through the forgiveness of our sins and the means of grace that sustain our faith and our very lives in this "little while" until he comes again, or until he takes us to be with him through the gates of our deaths, and this not of our own, but the Holy Spirit has revealed them to us.

And when in a while—maybe a very little while, or maybe a long while—death take us as it has those who have gone before, we will enter joy forever, we know that, we are assured of that, the Holy Spirit is declaring it to us, for the Spirit is at work in you and will keep you in baptismal faith, faith in the things yet to come and in Jesus' glorious promise, and will also comfort those whose loved ones are already there in heaven, with the sure confidence that we too "in a little while" will be there too, singing praises to our Lord and Savior, the risen Lord!

We began with a riddle. Here it is again: "Who makes it, has no need of it. Who buys it, does not use it. Who uses it, can neither see it nor feel it. What is it?" A coffin!

But the one who uses, well, will not use it for long, because even there, “in a little while” the Lord will come again and raise the body into the all-surpassing joy of resurrection to eternal life.

So let’s stand, united, and doing, following the council of the Holy Spirit who through the apostle Paul tells us “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” Jesus said. At first, it is confusing to say the least. But we know that Jesus was speaking of his death and post-resurrection appearances, he also spoke of his ascension into heaven until his appearing a second time at the end of the world. And he also spoke of our time here on earth as we await for his second coming, and while it is a little while, we are never abandoned for we do have His Spirit, his gifts and his care and love.

In his name, amen!