

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 23-24, 2016
John 16:12-22

“In a Little While”

“In a little while...” That’s what my dad used to say when my younger brother and I would ride along with him to go somewhere. Since we lived on a farm, to tag along with dad and go to town or to the implement dealer or wherever was kind of a big deal. Now I’m sure my dad would have loved just to get away by himself once in awhile and escape. But my brother and I were watchful for something like this. Any quick escape he may have tried was thwarted as we surrounded him physically and verbally: “Where are you going, Dad? Can we go, too?” More often than not, my dad usually took us along in the 1965 blue Dodge pickup to wherever we were headed. But then Dad would get to talking to people because he liked to talk and had the Irish gift of gab, which led to my brother and I getting restless (and sometimes in trouble) as we waited. We’d keep pestering my dad with, “When are we gonna go?” And invariably, my dad would give a very politically correct non-answer by saying, “In a little while.” On this Fifth Sunday of Easter, we hear Jesus say those same words a number of times to his disciples in the Gospel lesson: **“In a little while”** (John 16:16, 19). Those words of Jesus form the basis of today’s message under that same theme: “In a Little While.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for the day when He will no longer be physically present with them, though clearly they don’t understand this. The very first verse in today’s Gospel is Jesus telling them straight up: **“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”** (John 16:12). The befuddled disciples won’t get what all of this means – Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection – until **“...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”** (John 16:13-15). Jesus is preparing his disciples not only for his own departure from them, but also for the arrival of that promised Holy Spirit. It’s not until the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them at Pentecost that things start coming together for the disciples. It’s only when that Spirit is bestowed upon them that they are transformed from uncertain, hesitant, and fearful disciples into bold, confident, and courageous spokesmen for the crucified and risen Savior. That is what will happen in a little while.

So is Jesus saying what my dad was saying? Giving a vague non-answer to questions about specifics with when, or why, or how? Was Jesus just stonewalling the disciples because he really didn’t want to answer them? The questions we ask reveal whether we are being child-like or childish in faith. Jesus calls us to **“become like children”** (Matthew 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17) or we won’t enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus means here that even as adults we are called to embody child-like faith and trust in our heavenly Father. Jesus calls us to become child-like, but not childish, in our faith. There’s a difference between the two! Little children don’t necessarily need to know all the specifics and details about when, why, or how. And even if we tell them, they may not understand what we’re talking about. This is what Jesus is saying to his disciples when he tells them, **“In a little while.”** He is not brushing them off here, but in great love for his disciples, Jesus tells them: “You’re not ready for these things. You have a lot of growing and maturing to do first.” But we think we are ready! We have lots of questions for Jesus that come up during the course of this life. Sometimes we ask our questions not in child-like faith and trust, but in childish sullenness and irritability. We demand from Jesus: “I want to know!” That usually doesn’t get us very far. In contrast to this, when Pastor Greg Finke was with us last weekend, he talked about how God calls us to grow and mature in our faith. This is “discipleship” – becoming more like Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in us beginning in Holy Baptism. This growing and maturing

in faith, this discipleship, that occurs as we **“walk in newness of life”** (Romans 6:3-4), enables us to receive Jesus’ answer to the questions we ask, **“In a little while,”** and be okay with it.

As Jesus tells his disciples, **“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me”** (John 16:16), the disciples struggle to take this in. By their own admission, they say: **“We do not know what he is talking about”** (John 16:18). By God’s grace, we do know! We do know that forty days after He rose from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:3), which is what He meant when He said, **“A little while, and you will see me no longer.”** Jesus would withdraw his physical, visible presence from his followers, which means that they and we now walk by faith rather than by sight. But we also have Jesus’ promise: **“... and again a little while, you will see me,”** which points us ahead to that great and final day when Jesus will come again to take us to be with him forever; to take us home. Right now, we are in this time of grace, this in-between time, until Jesus comes again. It’s only for a little while, and until Jesus comes again, He’s given us work to do. He calls us to love and serve others as He himself has loved and served us, offering his very life upon the cross for our salvation (John 13). He calls us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them, remembering that Jesus himself is with us always even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:18-20). This is the great work to which our risen Savior calls each one of us to join him on his mission.

So, we have a choice in how we will conduct ourselves now in this time, this little while until Christ our risen Savior comes again. Will we weep, lament, and be sorrowful, even as Jesus says we will (John 16:20)? Or will we see beyond the weeping, lamenting, and sorrowing to something brighter and better? Will we, by the grace of God, keep our eyes focused ahead on what is yet to be, upon that **“new heaven and new earth”** where God himself will dwell with us and **“will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”** (Revelation 21:1, 4)? Will we put child-like faith and trust in the promise of God who has said: **“Behold, I am making all things new”** (Revelation 21:5)? We cannot deny the truth of Jesus’ words for our own lives: **“So also you will have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you”** (John 16:22). Hear those closing words again: **“No one will take your joy from you.”** In 1944, about eighteen months after the Nazi occupation of Norway, Eivind Josef Berggrav, Norwegian Lutheran bishop, author, and resistance leader against Hitler, , preached a sermon on these same words and said: “The words, ‘a little while,’ then, describe our triumph over all suffering. Eternity has begun today... This joy no one shall take from us. It gives us freedom and strength and energy even in affliction” (*For All the Saints: A Prayer Book For and By the Church*, Vol. III, pp. 1109-1110). To this we can only say “Amen!”

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!