

John 16:12-22

April 24, 2016

“In a Little While”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

**[Introduction]**     *Riddle me this...*

What occurs once every minute, twice in every moment, yet never in a thousand years? The answer: the letter *m*.

Riddles can be fun, but they can also be confounding. So... 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?

Puzzled?

The disciples reacted with puzzlement to the words Jesus spoke to them in our Gospel today: ***“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me”*** (v 16).

***To us, looking back, that's not much of a riddle.***

***We know that in a little while the lord will bring redemption, life, and salvation into the world.***

**[How Little?]**

But even now, we might ask, “*How little* a while?”

How about tomorrow? How about in three days?

Is that in “a little while”? “And again a little while?”

We're in the season of Easter, but this text takes place Maundy Thursday night.

“In a little while”—yes, tomorrow—Jesus will go to his death.

In a little while the disciples will see him beaten, hanging on a cross,  
the disciples we see him dead

—and then see him no longer when the grave door slams shut.

Jesus had earlier told the disciples this departure was for their benefit,  
but for now they are completely unable to grasp that.

They don't realize Jesus' death will be their redemption, life, salvation.  
Oh! They think having him visibly present is the whole point  
—teacher, leader, maybe ticket to fame and fortune.

They don't realize they desperately need a redeemer.  
Not understanding all this, in a little while they will mourn deeply (v 20a).

But **“again a little while”** will be three days. This *is* Easter!  
Jesus will descend into hell to declare his victory over Satan (16:11)  
and will rise victorious.  
And then the disciples will see him again!  
He will bring new life into their dead, despairing lives,  
turning their sorrow into joy (vv 20b–22).

**[Ascension]**

In a little while, at his death and resurrection,  
Jesus will bring redemption, life, and salvation.

Is that “*how little* a while” Jesus means? Three days?  
How about forty days? Is that in “a little while . . . and again a little while”?

In a little while the reunion between Jesus and his disciples will come to an end  
—just as our Easter season will in a couple more weeks.

Forty days after Easter, Jesus would return to his Father in his ascension.  
Again in a little while the disciples would not see him.

Recall that Jesus had told the disciples that his departure was for their benefit.

It now opens the door for the Holy Spirit to do his work (vv 12–15).

In a little while the Spirit of truth will take what Jesus received from the  
Father

and declare it to them (14:26).

In a little while the Spirit will make clear to the disciples  
the things that had happened.

In a little while the Spirit would also point the disciples to things yet to come:  
many will believe in the Lord through their word (17:20).

And finally,

in a little while the Spirit will bring them to remember Jesus' glorious promise  
to return and take them to where he is going (14:1–4).

*How little* a while will that be?

Two thousand years? Two thousand *more* years? This week?  
Jesus calls it “again a little while.”

In a little while, at his ascension and return,  
Jesus will bring redemption, life, salvation.

[*Life*] For you see... Life for us really is only a little while.

And yet we become angry and say:

I wouldn't lose my temper if my co-workers were easier to get along with, or if my kids behaved better, or if my spouse were more considerate.

We become and impatient and say:

I would be a very patient person if it weren't for traffic jams and long lines in the grocery store. If I didn't have so many things to do, and if the people around me weren't so slow, I would never become impatient!

We lust and say:

I would have a pure mind if there weren't so many sexual images in our culture.

We have anxiety and say:

I wouldn't worry about the future if my life were just a little more secure—if I had more money, and no health problems.

We have spiritual apathy and say:

My spiritual life would be so much more vibrant and I wouldn't struggle with sin if only my small group were more encouraging,  
or if Sunday school were more engaging,  
or if the music in the worship service were more lively,  
or if the sermons were better.

Life for us is really only a little while

and yet we have long evenings and weeks that last an eternity.

Instead of blaming someone or something, we need to remember whose we are.

That means we desperately need to see Jesus  
for the redemption, life, and salvation only he brings.

For we are baptized into the death and resurrection of the Lord  
and forgiven of sin!

And each week that forgiveness is given again in the absolution  
and in Jesus' scarred flesh and shed blood present in his Holy Meal.

The Spirit of truth is at work in you and will keep you in baptismal faith,  
faith in the things yet to come and in Jesus' glorious promise.

**[Conclusion]**

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.

The one who uses it will not need it long,  
for in a little while ... the Lord will come again.

The Lord will come again.... in a little while. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding guard our  
hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.