

Sermon Draft for May 18, 2025

Text: John 16:12–22

Sermon: “In A Little While”

As your favorite streaming service loads, you read a note on the screen that says, “Catch it while you can.” In a little while shows are about to leave the streaming service, and you need to take advantage of your ability to see them before they are gone.

Calendars of availability shape our binge-watching habits. But they do more than that. They shape our lives. “This week only,” the home improvement store says. “Get them before they are gone,” the grocery store advertises. We are accustomed to seizing the moment because advertising has immersed us in a culture of transition. All things are transitory and to enjoy life to the utmost you need to act now.

Sometimes, we carry these calendars into our spiritual lives. Such pressure causes pain.

We can approach life in the Spirit like an injection of steroids that suddenly give us strength, only to be disappointed when we discover how it is more like a tree planted by streams of water that produces fruit in good season (Psalm 1).

I'm not real good at riddles but let's try one. 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. 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?

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.

But even now, we might ask, “How little a while? How about tomorrow and 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, 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. 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. We all need Jesus, our 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 (vs 20b–22).

In a little while, at his death and resurrection, Jesus will bring redemption, life, and salvation. Is that “**how little a while**” Jesus means? Yes, but how about forty days and more? 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 in the new lives of these men (vs 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.

You've been shopping for a new car over the last few days and then finally find the one that suits you best. You drive it home, park it in the driveway. You stand there with a big grin on your face. It's the perfect car for you. Just the sight of it brings you joy.

Over the next few days, you drive "your" perfect car to and from your many destinations. And what do you discover? Your new car is everywhere. Once your mind and sight have become tuned to this particular make and model, you can't miss them. Numbers of people seem to be driving one just like yours, and not many escape your notice.

Jesus spent three years tuning the disciples' hearts for what was to come. For them, it was unclear at first (John 16:18); the cross of sacrifice was not the model they wanted. It's not what they would have chosen for themselves.

But when Jesus' nail-scarred hands and feet were before their very eyes after the resurrection, the pieces of the puzzle began to fit together.

Looking at their sin-tainted lives, guided by the Holy Spirit (16:13), they realized the cross was a perfect choice. Especially when equipped with the perfect accessory, an empty tomb.

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, 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 and in that little while he's bringing it to the world by the disciples' word. Is that “how little a while” Jesus means?

Yes, but how about the little while of your lifetime and then a little while? Is that in “a little while . . . and again a little while”? Yes, that too. Life for us really is only a little while.

That means we desperately need to see Jesus for the redemption, life, and salvation only he brings. That’s the way we came into the world. But in a little while for many of us only a few days, we were baptized into the death and resurrection of the Lord and forgiven of our 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. Pronounce absolution for the above examples.

We have not seen the Lord’s scarred hands and feet with our eyes, but we have seen them by faith, and **“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”** (20:29).

In a while, maybe a very little while death will take us as it has those who have gone before. You know the deep sorrow of mourning just as those who love you will know that sorrow.

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

“Again,” then, “a little while” and we will see Jesus with our eyes.

Our body's time in the tomb, even as our soul is rejoicing with the Lord, will be the **“twinkling of an eye”** (1 Corinthians 15:52), and we will rise to see him forever.

Jesus offers us a powerful joy that endures. Jesus says to His disciples, ***“I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you”*** (16:22). No one can take our joy.

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, and for his redeemed, all the sorrow of death will be turned into the all-surpassing joy of resurrection to eternal life.

In Jesus name! Amen