

John 16.16-22
Jubilate (Easter 4)
22 April 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

"Jesus said: 'A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.'
So some of His disciples said to one another, 'What is this that He says to us, "A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me."'"

Yes, Jesus. What in the world *do* You mean?

You remember the evening of the Resurrection of Our Lord? The two disciples were on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13ff.). And suddenly, they were joined by Another. Dejected, they told the Stranger all that had happened to Jesus. And then, then, the Stranger opened His mouth to speak: "O foolish ones!" He said, "and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" And He took bread. Gave thanks. And gave it to them. The Sacrament of the Altar! And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him.

A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.

You recall, too, what else happened that evening. The 10 are holed up in their private room with the Do Not Disturb sign hanging out in front. And into their midst walks the risen Lord Jesus. And breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose soever sins you forgive, they have been forgiven them; and whose soever sins you bind, they have been bound." The Office of the Keys. Confession. And, more important, Absolution.

A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.

And then there's the meeting at Galilea after the resurrection. Jesus was there. Just as He had promised. And He spoke. "Go! Do the whole disciple thing among all the nations. Baptize! Teach! And lo, I AM with you always, even to the end of the age." The Word. Taught and proclaimed. The Sacrament of Baptism!

A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me.

So what do all of these have in common?

Well, at first glance, it's pretty obvious: they all have in common that the Lord Jesus came among His disciples. He was risen from the dead. Physically. They heard audible words from His red lips; no longer

blue in death. He ate fish. The very bone structure of His hands had the strength to break bread. And Thomas stuck his finger into His flesh-and-blood side and hands. No ghost!

But listen to this very carefully: it is not in this way that Jesus' words are fulfilled. Frankly, that would be a little disappointing. For the words would then apply only to the eleven—to the eleven who first heard Him utter those words, "A little while and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me." To the eleven who saw and touched and heard the risen Lord Jesus.

And then what of the rest of us? The sorrow that the disciples had at losing their Lord in death—we'd still have that. Their weeping and lamentation—that would still belong to us. For *they* would have gotten Jesus; but not us.

And the only joy to replace our sorrow at the death of the Son of God. The only joy in the face of our sins and our own death. The only joy in the face of the suffering of this life...would be vicarious joy. Joy experienced through another. No true joy at all.

But that's not how Jesus' words are fulfilled. Not by His mere appearance to the 11.

Because all of these post-resurrection appearances of Jesus have something more profound in common. Something more enduring. Something more comforting. Not only to the disciples, but even to us.

Because from this time forth Jesus never shows up unless accompanied by His Word and Sacraments; and His Word and Sacraments never show up unless accompanied by Jesus. That's just how it works. On the road to Emmaus it was the Word and Supper. And the Lord Jesus.

In the upper room it was the life-giving Spirit forever and powerfully bound to Holy Absolution so that it does what it says—forgives sins. And Jesus.

At the mountain top in Galilee it was Baptism and preaching. And Jesus.

In Catechesis we call these the Means of Grace—the Word, the Keys, Baptism, and the Sacrament.

But you could actually go a step further. In fact, you actually *should* go a step further, and say, these are not only 'the Means of Grace'—how you get grace—but even more, 'the Means of Jesus'—how you get Jesus.

Because forever from this point on this is what Jesus means: The Word, the Keys, Baptism, the Sacrament? Jesus chooses, for your sake, to bind Himself to these. Inextricably. And forever. So that you may never doubt. Like Thomas. So that you may never be left alone. As those on the road to Emmaus felt. So that you may never inconsolably lament and weep. As the disciples did at the death of their Lord. So that you can never have sadness but that it's replaced with the joy of having Jesus. And not Jesus as some sort of phantom. And not Jesus as a thought or cogitation or feeling somehow nebulously attached to someone sitting far away, remote, uncaring in the highest heaven. But flesh-and-blood, crucified and risen Jesus. The very same one into whose side Thomas thrust his fingers; the very same one who made the Emmaus disciples' hearts burn within them. The very same who commanded the eleven to preach and baptize and then promised them—and you—"Lo! I AM with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Word. The Keys. Baptism. The Sacrament. And Jesus. Forever and inextricably bound together.

Now, I know you all get that. At least intellectually. That's what you hear from this pulpit every Sunday.

But there's an old demonic trick out there that's been around since the fall into sin. It's called enthusiasm. And what the devil does is make—or try to make—an enthusiast of all of us. But for us, who are already in Christ through our Baptism into His death and resurrection, he knows his job is steeper. He knows that whatever he comes with, it can't be completely impious and devoid of God and His Christ. He knows that it has to have a ring of truth to it for us to swallow the lie.

The lie of enthusiasm—what the devil wants us all to do—is to go looking for Jesus where we'd like to find Him and not where He says He can be found.

And sadly, fellow-redeemed, far too few Christians know this. Far too few Christians know where to find Jesus because their preachers take Him out of where He promises to be. If you say that getting baptized is only to fulfill a command of Christ. And then say Baptism is only a symbolic action for the choice you've made to follow Jesus, then you've taken Jesus out of Baptism. If you say that the Last Supper—as they like to call it—has only the purpose of remembering, of conjuring up in your mind what Jesus did for you—and that it's not His true and real Body and Blood for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins, then you've taken Jesus out of His Sacrament. And if you say that Confession is good, but no man has the authority to forgive sins in Christ's stead, then you've taken Jesus right out of Confession, too. And then what are you left with?

Nothing. Just water. Just bread. Just wine. And just your own plagued conscience that hopes to high heaven the Lord is actually good and gracious and forgives sins.

And so they don't look for Him where He can be found. They can't. He's been stripped out of where He promises to be. And so instead, they dream up where He must be. Or where they'd like Him to be. You can find Him inside of yourself, they say. You can find Him through the success of self-help. You can find Him in the emotional rush of swaying hands and a throbbing base guitar. You can find Him in the warm feelings you get from others who care for and about you. In its most extreme form, you can even talk to Him and He'll talk right back—imperceptibly to everyone else, of course, but through feelings and circumstances that only you can interpret, through coincidence and happenstance. And always quite apart from His revealed Word.

Fellow-redeemed: I plead with you: don't fall for this. See it for what it is. The trick's as old as sin itself. In fact, it is sin itself. The original sin. The sin of clinging to God apart from His promises. Idolatry. But it's ingenious idolatry because it looks and feels like the real thing.

And that's exactly why Jesus says the words He does today: A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me. And I am going to the Father.

He is going to the Father—He is ascending to the Father's right hand—not to leave you but to be with you. In a most comforting way. For in the face of your death, you have the blessed Sacrament of Him who died that you might live. In the face of your ineluctable feelings of guilt and the sure sense that you must be condemned to everlasting hell, you have His promise that whoever is baptized and believes will be *saved* because in your Baptism Christ puts Himself on you! In the face of your sins, you have His Spirit and Absolution, speaking you free of all sins. And with them all you have Jesus Himself.

A little while and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while and you will see Me.

Amen.

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jsb