

NOT YET READY

John 16:12-22

Fifth Sunday of Easter (Series C)/Confirmation Sunday

May 19, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The Gospel lesson for the Fifth Sunday of Easter comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 16, verses 12 through 22. It is on page 765 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson things are about to change, so Jesus prepares his disciples for it. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 16, beginning at verse 12, we read in Jesus' name.

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When 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. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

¹⁶ "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." ¹⁷ 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'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear Owen, Peter, Katie, Luke, and Jake,

I don't want to let you go. I have much more I would like to teach you. Confirmation is kind of a sad day for me. I can't give you homework anymore, I can't force you to memorize the catechism anymore, and I can't make you come to class anymore. Basically, I can't force you to learn the Christian faith anymore. And this scares me, because you're not ready. You all passed the class, but you have not really learned enough. You are still not ready.

I should explain what I mean. Ready for what? Were you ready to stand here and confess that you believe this Christian faith? Yes, I believe you were. You learned enough to know whether or not you believe the Christian faith to be true. And are you ready to receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar? Yes, I believe you are. You have learned enough so that

you can examine yourselves and eat and drink in a worthy manner. You have learned enough to be ready for these two things.

But are you ready to face the trials and temptations of the Christian life? No. You are not ready. You have not learned enough, and you are not strong enough. The world is dangerous. The devil is fierce and mean. And your flesh is sinful enough to lead you astray on its own, even without the help of the world or the devil. You are not ready, and I am not ready to let you go.

I suppose what we both need to remember is that confirmation is not graduation. I've told you this before—several times—but I'm telling you again, because you need to remember this, and everyone else here needs to know that I have told you this, because they have their part to play in holding you accountable to your confirmation vows. Confirmation is not graduation. It is the opposite. It is an entrance into deeper learning.

You just stood here and said that you “believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” That is, you believe this Christian faith to be true, and you trust this God to save you. Furthermore, you also promised “to remain faithful to the teaching of the Christian Church, and in the use of the means of grace.” I heard you, and they all heard you. You promised “to remain faithful to the teaching of the Christian Church, and in the use of the means of grace.”

And you know that the means of grace are the Word and the Sacraments. “To remain faithful to the teaching of the Christian Church, and in the use of the means of grace” means that you continue to faithfully attend worship with God's people, because this is where you will hear the Word of God taught and receive Christ's body and blood. It means that, as long as you are a member of this congregation, you should be right here at 10:30 every Sunday morning. And if you or your family move to another city, you should find a faithful congregation that confesses the same faith and be there at whatever time they meet. And if you're just out of town for the weekend, you should find a congregation to attend there. It is essential for our faith that we gather with God's people around Word and Sacrament. Like bread for your body, this is food for your spirit. This is what it means “to remain faithful to the teaching of the Christian Church, and in the use of the means of grace.”

And I know that you knew this when you made your confirmation vows, because I taught you that's what it means. I'm not springing anything new on you. This isn't one of those “read the fine print” things where you figure out what you signed up for after the fact. I made sure that you knew what you were promising. You have committed yourselves to a lifetime of learning and growing as a child of God. This is a big deal. Marriage and at the Baptism of your children are probably the only other times you will make a lifetime commitment like this. That's why I asked you to consider this carefully before making these vows. And I gave you an out as well. I told you that you don't have to confirm your faith. I told you that if you don't believe this Christian faith, or if you don't intend to faithfully attend worship, then it would be better for you to not confirm your faith. I also told you that you could wait and think about it if you want to. I told you that if you take these vows, I would expect you to keep them. I've already told you this, but I'm telling you again, because I want you to remember, and I want everyone else here to know that you know this.

One of the saddest parts of being a pastor is when a young person confirms their faith, but then they rarely, if ever, come back. Sometimes it leaves me very confused, because it might be someone who did all the work joyfully. They always had their homework done on time. They nailed the quizzes—excuse me, “celebrations of academic achievement.” And they were engaged in class. They weren't just going through the motions, but they honestly cared about the material. They saw the value in it. But then, the week after confirmation, they're not here. Another week

goes by, and they're not here. The summer goes by, a year goes by, and they don't come back. What will become of the faith they confessed before us? Sooner or later, it will die. I can't say how long it will take, but eventually it will weaken and die.

Some of you can probably think of what individuals I'm talking about. And this is actually good. I want you to know. If you're curious, go look at the confirmation pictures in the fellowship hall. See who hasn't been here. I want the members of this congregation to know, because it is the responsibility of all of us to hold them accountable to their confirmation vows.

And for the five of you who have confirmed your faith this morning, you need to know that I believed you just now when you promised "to remain faithful to the teaching of the Christian Church, and in the use of the means of grace." I believed you. So if I don't see you here, you will hear from me. And I expect that your family and fellow church members believed you as well. And it is also their responsibility to hold you accountable

We will hold you accountable to this, not just because we want you to keep your word, but because it is important. It is essential to your preservation and growth as a Christian that you continue to learn God's Word and receive Christ's body and blood. You are not yet ready to stop learning, and you never will be, for as long as you live.

On the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples much the same thing: **"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"** (16:12). These disciples had been with Jesus—as best as we can tell—for about three years. They travelled around Israel with him. They heard all his sermons and parables. They asked him questions. When they were afraid to ask certain questions, he read their minds and answered them anyway. They had three years of intense learning directly from Jesus. You had two years—minus summers, snow days, and holidays—where you have spent one hour a week, plus a little bit of homework, learning the catechism and parts of the Scriptures. They received much more instruction than you have, but they were still not ready, and neither are you. So they were not done learning, and neither are you.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. One of his disciples had already left to betray him (13:30). Jesus' death was now imminent. So Jesus said to the eleven who remained, **"A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while and you will see me"** (16:16).

This is a significant statement in this text. Whenever something is repeated, that's a clue to us that it is important. And this gets repeated two more times as the disciples try to figure out what Jesus is talking about. They connected this statement with another thing Jesus had said to them that night: that he is going to the Father (14:12). So Jesus is going away, and he is going to the Father, but it won't be long. So what is Jesus talking about? The disciples were confused. I suppose they were confused because, how is he going to go to the Father? And, if it's only going to be a little while, why would they be so sad that they weep and lament? They are confused.

And people still might be confused about it. There are two events that come to mind that Jesus might be speaking of. Is he talking about his death and resurrection? Is that the **"Little while"** he is talking about? Or is he talking about his ascension forty days later and his return on the Last Day? People have wondered about this, but, honestly, the answer is really quite simple. He's talking about his death and resurrection. And this is obvious for a few reasons.

First, Jesus spoke these words on the evening before his crucifixion. The timing is important. For a few days the disciples would not see Jesus. They would weep and lament, because he was

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dead, and they thought he was gone for good. But in just a few days Jesus would rise from the dead, and they would see him again. After this they had a joy that no one could ever take away.

Second, this doesn't really fit Jesus' ascension, because, even though they did not see Jesus any longer with their eyes, they did not weep and lament when Jesus ascended into heaven. In fact, "They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). They were not sad when Jesus ascended into heaven. The exact opposite was true.

Third, sometimes people get thrown off by Jesus' statement that he is going to the Father. This is the part that makes it seem like he's talking about his ascension. But Jesus also went to the Father after his crucifixion. He appeared before the Father to offer his blood as the once for all sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:12). Then, having secured our redemption, he returns to his disciples. He appears to them on the evening of his resurrection and bestows the Holy Spirit upon them (20:22).

So Jesus is talking about going away to the Father, by way of the cross, to secure our eternal redemption. This is how he prepares a place in his Father's house for us (14:2). And this is how he now sends the Holy Spirit to us. In order for us to receive the Holy Spirit without being destroyed by God's holiness, we must first be cleansed from our sins. Every benefit we have as Christians is a direct result of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

So the disciples did not understand at the time, but in just a few days they would. If Jesus is only going to be gone for a little while, why would they weep and lament? You don't weep and lament when someone goes away for just a little while. It's like when your mom says she's going to the grocery store. You don't weep and lament. You just say, "Buy ice cream." And you don't worry, because she will be back soon. So why would the disciples weep and lament when Jesus goes away? It's because his brief departure looks a lot more permanent. He departs through the cross. He actually dies. This, for all the world, looks permanent.

The world thinks they have killed off the Christ, so the world rejoices. The disciples think they have lost their God and Christ, so they weep and lament. But on the third day their sorrow is turned to joy. Jesus rises from the dead with forgiveness and life for all who believe in him. Never will he die again.

Jesus compares this to a mother giving birth. And this is a really brilliant analogy. "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow, because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world" (16:21). When the anguish is over, and the child is born, there is incredible joy. But notice this: the mother isn't happy just because the pain is over. I'm sure she's happy that the pain has subsided, but there is much more to rejoice over. She is filled with joy because a child is born! It's not just that the pain subsided. Who cares about the pain anymore? She rejoices because the pain has resulted in something marvelous. Her suffering gives way to life. It's not just life as usual anymore. It is much better.

Jesus compares this to what the disciples go through with Jesus' death and resurrection. For a few days their God and Christ is dead. This is the worst. They have deep sorrow, and it seems that nothing can make it better. But then Jesus appears, and they are filled with joy. And their joy is about much more than the mere fact that he's not dead anymore. The greatest joy is in what his death accomplished. They rejoice, and we rejoice, because the greatest pain has resulted in the greatest good. Just like that newborn baby, they rejoice because something new—something better—is here. It's not just about Jesus not being dead anymore. It's about what his death accomplished. It's not just life as usual anymore. It is much better. His death has made atonement for our sins. It has granted new life, eternal life.

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And, because Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sins, he now sends his Holy Spirit upon us. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. He takes what is Christ's and declares it to us. For the apostles, this meant bringing to their remembrance what Jesus had taught them and inspiring them to write their portions of the Scriptures. For us, it means that the Holy Spirit takes those very same Scriptures, and he teaches them to us, not merely to our minds, but also to our hearts.

Dear Owen, Peter, Katie, Luke, and Jake,

The Holy Spirit is your teacher. I am not your teacher; the Holy Spirit is your teacher. So I do not wish that you would hold to my teaching. Hold to Christ. This is what I have tried to teach you. And as you remain faithful in the use of the means of grace—that is, as you faithfully hear the Word of God and receive his body and blood—the Holy Spirit will use these means to strengthen and preserve you in this Christian faith. He will teach you the will and love of God through the Scriptures. He will strengthen and preserve you through Christ's body and blood.

You are not ready. The world is dangerous. The devil is fierce and mean. And your flesh is sinful enough to lead you astray on its own, even without the help of the world or the devil. You are not ready, but your God will shelter you under his wing. Christ has died for you. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. And until that day he has sent his Holy Spirit to be your teacher and protector. So cling to Christ where he has promised to be for you—in his Word and in the Sacrament. Here the Holy Spirit brings Jesus to you, and with him you receive forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.