

Easter 5 5/15/22
John 16:12-22 C

A LITTLE WHILE, AND YOU WILL SEE ME NO LONGER; AND AGAIN A LITTLE WHILE, AND YOU WILL SEE ME.

“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe” (Jn 20:25).

Those are the words of Thomas – Doubting Thomas. And eight days later, Jesus came. And Thomas saw and Thomas believed. Even though we do not see Jesus with our physical eyes, we believe, even in the midst of tears. But, the day is coming when, like Thomas, we will see Jesus, with our own eyes.

Which is the same thing Job says. You remember Job – he was a blameless and upright man, a Christian, who was quite rich in material wealth. And, he loses his livestock and herds, and even his sons and daughters. He loses his health, as sores cover him from soles of his feet to the crown of his head. And as if that was not enough, his three friends come and say a lot of truly stupid things. And yet, in the midst of his grief and anguish, Job confesses the hope he has in Jesus,

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall **see** God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold” (19:25-27).

Yes, in heaven, we will see Jesus with our own physical eyes. But, on this side of heaven, in this valley of the shadow of death, we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). And we are not the first people who struggle with that.

The words of our Gospel this morning are what is called the “Farewell Discourse” of John’s Gospel. Jesus and the disciples are in the upper room. Jesus washes their feet; He predicts Judas will betray Him; He gives them the new commandment to love one another as He has loved us; He predicts Peter’s denial; and He prepares them not only for His upcoming death and burial, but for His ascension to the right hand of the Father in heaven, as well. He begins with those words I’m guessing you know well, “Let not your heart be troubled,” and then He tells them why there is **no** reason for our hearts to be troubled, including the words of our lesson for today, “A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me” (v. 16).

His betrayal and death were mere hours away. In a short while, the disciples’ whole world would be turned upside down. They are sad; they are despairing at these words of Jesus. In “a little while” they would see the resurrected, living Jesus again. Then, “again,” in a little while, they would not see Him because He would ascend to the Father. That news leaves them terribly distressed, full of worry, which is why He says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (v. 12).

Saints of God, walking by faith is a challenge and a struggle. We do not walk by sight, and that is a good thing, because sometimes, maybe even more often than we would like to admit, tears fill our eyes; the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death overwhelms us; and we find ourselves like the disciples, despairing, distressed, and doubting the ways and will of God.

Jesus is teaching the disciples – and us – that there is no reason for our hearts to be troubled even though life on this side of heaven can be painful; there may well be times when we are sorrowful and weep.

For well over a week, a football player, young man, a son, a brother, a member of the class of 2022, a young man with a lifetime ahead of him was missing. Herculean efforts were made to locate him by law enforcement, first responders, members of the community. And our worst fears came true with the discovery of his body. In the midst of those anxious hours, there was not one parent of any age that did not have the thought – how would I feel if that were my child. We grieve. We mourn. Tears come – and there is no reason to apologize for our tears; after all, Jesus Himself wept at the death of His friend (cf. Jn 11:35).

Missing loved ones. Wars and rumors of wars. Tornadoes, fires, and floods. Surgeries and treatments. Rape, theft, vandalism, greed, jealousy, hatred, and division. Injustice, pain, sadness, and loneliness.

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come” (v. 21). Like childbirth, earthly life can be painful. We are in sorrow and pain, distress and discomfort, tears – real tears -- fill our eyes. **And, it is all because of sin.** We have to be very careful to understand this: God is not punishing us for our sin. This is simply the reality of living in a world cursed by sin. But, the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that God does not want you to be sorrowful nor distressed, so He sent Jesus to take away the curse of sin.

Christ was born of human mother, and willingly shared our humanity. That means that He took upon Himself, His own body, all of our sin and its wages of death, and all the troubles, and distress, and grief and sorrow, and tears that sin brings. And His blood was shed to wipe it all away. He died so that sin and its wages of death and its awful curse would have no hold over us and the 3rd day He rose again to defeat our greatest enemy, death itself.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! That is the glorious message of Easter. It means that Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and we will rise to eternal in Jesus. The words of Revelation are true for us, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God (21:3)." We will see Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb who was slain so we may live with our own eyes!

We hear those words of Jesus, "Again a little while, and you will see me," to which we add with Job, "How our hearts yearn within us!" We have that hope, we have that confidence, we have that boast because we can say with all certainty that these victorious words and promises of Christ are meant for our ears, our comfort, and our joy. And the Good News for us who walk by this day by faith, and not by sight, is that you don't have to wait to get home to heaven to see Jesus!

The Bible tells us this, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (He 4:15). Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. That means that when we weep, our Lord Jesus weeps with us.

Our Good Shepherd knows the frailty and weakness of His sheep. Our Lord knows how hard Satan works to rob us of the joy of Easter to lead us to despair. He is Immanuel. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age," He promises (Mt 28:20). Even in the hour of trial, Jesus is with us.

Baptized and living in Him, Jesus dwells with and in us, helping us, strengthening us, upholding us with His grace as we hear His Word and eat and drink His life-giving Body and Blood, until that time that He comes to

take us to be with Him in heaven. Luther so beautifully puts it this way in his Little Catechism:

“We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.”

Like Job of old, no matter how dark the valley of the shadow of death, we can always trust and remain certain that we will “see” Jesus with our own eyes and He will wipe all the tears from our eyes. Truly, truly, our hearts yearn within us!