

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

“Let’s See That Again”

*“A little while, and you will see Me no longer;
and again a little while, and you will see Me.” (Jn. 16:16)*

If I’m being totally honest, I’ve never liked this part of the lectionary. It’s Easter, right? So, why, after only three weeks, are we back on Maundy Thursday, the night when our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed? Didn’t we just do this? We’ve *seen* this one already! Why can’t we get the Road to Emmaus, or Jesus appearing to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias? You know, something a little more Easter-y?

But then it occurred to me that this text is like one of those movies you have to see twice. *The Sixth Sense* is probably the most famous example, but there are others: *Donnie Darko*, *The Prestige*—all fine movies the *first* time through, but at the end there’s a twist that makes you want to go back and watch the whole thing over *again*; and when you do, it’s like a whole new experience, turning what you’d thought was a pretty good movie and into a *great* one.

Jesus said: “A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me” (Jn. 16:16). Try to imagine this is your first time seeing this one. Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes. They have no idea what’s about to happen, no clue as to what Jesus is referring to. “A little while?” they ask themselves. “We’ve no idea what He’s talking about” (Jn. 16:18). How could they? As far as they knew, things were going great. Jesus was *on fire*. He’d just recently called Lazarus out from his tomb and been welcomed as a king to Jerusalem. The whole *world* had gone after Him (cf. Jn. 12:19)!

But then He’d started talking about His body and blood being given and shed. “One of you will betray me” (Mt. 26:21). They’d all denied it, of course, Peter even pledging to stay by His side, no matter what (Mt. 26:33). But Jesus was adamant:

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...I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (Jn. 16:20, 22).

So many questions: Weep and lament over...what? Rejoice over what? What sorrow? What joy? “See You again”? Where are You going? Why can’t we come? *Why* won’t our joy be taken from us? It must have been maddening.

But it didn’t take long for them to find out. A little while, and Jesus was betrayed with a kiss, Judas and his co-conspirators coming out as against a criminal. A little while, and Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. “For all who take the sword shall

perish by the sword” (Mt. 26:52). A little while, and all the disciples left Him and fled. Even Peter, who stuck around to see the end of Jesus' trial, ran away weeping. A little while, and they saw Him no more.

Meanwhile, the world rejoiced. It rejoiced as Jesus gave Himself up, claiming to be divine (Mt. 26:64). It rejoiced as it spit in His face and struck Him, receiving not one threat in return (cf. 1 Pr. 2:23). It rejoiced as Pilate succumbed to the riotous crowd's demand to “Crucify Him!” Jesus died and was buried. And the world rejoiced.

Until, again a little while, in the greatest twist of them all, Jesus rose from the dead. Then it was the *disciples* who were glad (cf. Jn. 20:20). The guards at the tomb trembled and became like dead men (Matt. 28:4). But they could see it now, what Jesus had meant by, “A little while, and you will see me no longer.” He wasn't leaving; He was doing precisely what He'd come to do: not to *be* served, but *to serve*, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45); to lay down His life for the sheep and take it up again (Jn. 10:16, 18). Thinking back on that night, seeing those events in light of the resurrection, it was like a whole new experience, turning what they'd thought was just a horrible night, a horrible weekend, into a *great* one.

And it shows in what the disciples do next. They're not afraid, not when Jesus is taken from them into heaven (Lk. 24:52), not even when they are imprisoned and beaten for teaching in Jesus' name (Acts 5:28f). Their sorrow has turned into joy, and no one, not the devil, the world, or their sinful flesh, can take their joy from them. How could they? They'd *seen* this one already! They knew the twist: Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) And that changes everything.

Think of Mary, who stood weeping outside the empty tomb. She saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She, assuming the body had merely been moved, said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away” (Jn. 20:11-15). Mary was so blinded by her grief that she could not see past her sorrow to the joy of the resurrection. It wasn't until Jesus called her by name that she suddenly realized who she was talking to, and her sorrow turned into joy.

Just so, our sorrow is like a whole new experience when we see it in light of the fact that Christ has been raised. “A little while, and you will see Me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see Me” (Jn. 16:16). Sorrow is never permanent. “Weeping

may tarry for the night,” writes David in the Psalms, “but joy comes with the morning” (30:5). And because we know that, because we know the twist, that changes our whole outlook on life, and the things we don’t like in particular. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4 (vv. 13-14),

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul reminds his fellow Christians that because of the resurrection things are different now. Because Christ Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pt. 2:24), paying our ransom price, death is like sleep. Those who die in Christ will not perish but will wake up and enter into eternal life on the Last Day. So, not even *death* can end our gladness, let alone pain, loneliness, or disappointment. A little while, and we will see Jesus, whom, in the words of Job, who’s sort of the ultimate example of suffering in the Old Testament, “I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:27).

We also read in today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah, “Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength” (40:31). It doesn’t take much in this sinful world to weaken us: a failure here, an unmet expectation there, a temptation that refuses to go away. “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted” (Isa. 40:30). Sin is a sickness that affects us all equally. No temptation has overtaken any of us that is not common to man (1 Cor. 10:13). “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

But, wretched men and women that we are, Jesus says, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). Jesus, who took His Sabbath rest in the tomb, is our strength, for “He does not faint or grow weary” (Isa. 40:28). He’s in His State of Exaltation now. He’s “dialed up to eleven,” as we say. He rose from the dead, conquering the grave; and so, even in our weakness we rejoice. Christ came for sinners. He forgives sinners. He forgives *you*, even though you can’t see Him. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29). Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Because there’s *more*. This isn’t our first time through. We’ve *seen* this one already! We’ve seen it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know what happens: a little while, and our sorrow will turn into joy. He will call each of us by name, and no one will take our joy from us.

This is Easter, and the thing about Easter is it changes everything. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain, you are still in

your sins, and there is no hope. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, and so He is victorious. His Word and promises are true, making what would have been, at best, a mildly interesting but ultimately pointless story about a failed Messiah into a *great* one. Everything is different now—our hearts *already* rejoice! “But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31). It’s just going to be a little while.

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria