

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 6

May 22, 2022

Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

In a little while

¹⁶ “In a little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.”

¹⁷ Therefore some of his disciples asked one another, “What does he mean when he tells us, ‘In a little while you are not going to see me, and again in a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going away to the Father?’” ¹⁸ So they kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he’s saying.”

¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you trying to determine with one another what I meant by saying, ‘In a little while you are not going to see me, and again in a little while you will see me’?” ²⁰ Amen, Amen, I tell you: You will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth has pain, because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of her joy that a person has been born into the world.

²² “So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. ²³ In that day you will not ask me anything. Amen, Amen, I tell you: Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete.

—John 16:16-24

In a little while, pictures will be taken. **In a little while**, more cake will be cut. **In a little while**, families will gather. This is because today is a special day. Today, a huge part of our focus is on the six young men and women coming forward to speak their promises before God and their fellow believers. They are promising to remain connected to their Lord through His church. They are announcing their agreement and understanding of God's Word as taught here at Emmanuel Lutheran Church and within our church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Today is a day of celebration. We thank the Holy Spirit for working faith in the hearts of these believers. We thank God for their confidence to stand on His Word. Today, we also have reason to celebrate as we bring three adults into our fold and three baptized children. They may not have the robes, verses, and parties, but this is a wonderful blessing. **In a little while**, we will hear these promises made. Ultimately, this joy that we have today, that the confirmands have today, is not about the celebrations, parties, and cake, although those things help. Our joy is that which comes from Jesus. This is the very joy that Jesus assured his disciples of in the Gospel for today. In this little while of life, this joy is experienced. This joy will be experienced in full **in a little while**.

The Gospel for the sixth Sunday of Easter and Confirmation Sunday takes place on the night before Jesus was betrayed. In the upper room, Jesus talked with His disciples. He shared words of comfort for them as he approached his death. He shared words of joy with them. This is the joy that would come **in a little while**.

Jesus said to his disciples, “*In a little while you are not going to see me anymore, and again in a little while you will see me, because I am going away to the Father.*” The disciples did not understand what Jesus said. So, they asked each other what he meant. However, let's not get too hard on the disciples for their lack of understanding. The last statement can certainly be difficult for us to understand right away. Also, consider the context in which Jesus said this to them. He had not died yet. Would they understand that this meant that Jesus was going to die? Would they understand that this meant that Jesus would remain in the tomb for only three days? Would they understand that he would rise from the grave? Before this section, Jesus spoke about the work of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the truth of all that Jesus would do could only be understood as the Holy Spirit enlightens one.

Perceiving that they did not understand, in love, Jesus explained his statement to the disciples. Jesus starts His explanation by saying, ‘Amn, amn,’ This is rendered as ‘Ye verily’ or ‘Very truly’ in some translations. In this translation, it is rendered as ‘Amen, amen.’ When Jesus says this, it means it's time to listen up. He is the only person that says this. When he says it, a profound truth follows!

Jesus said that his disciples would weep. They would experience grief. Yet, the world would experience joy. Why would they experience grief while the world rejoices? Well, it's about what is coming very soon. Jesus, their master, teacher, and friend, was about to be arrested. He was about to be tortured. He was about to be killed. That weekend was going to be a difficult one for his disciples. They would experience intense grief.

However, this grief would not last for more than just a little while. Like a pregnant woman who experiences the pain of childbirth and then the joy of a newborn child, the disciples would have joy. The disciples would experience grief for a little while. But their grief would go away, and they would then experience wonderful joy.

This is because they would see Jesus again. Yes, he would die. Yet, Jesus would rise from the grave. Their joy would come from the resurrection of Jesus. They would have joy because Jesus was alive again.

The reason for the joy alone isn't just that Jesus was alive again, but what this meant for them. This is shown in Jesus' exhortation to them to pray. Jesus' resurrection meant a right relationship with God. In Jesus' name, they could approach the Father in prayer. They could approach him any time. In Jesus' resurrection, they knew they were justified. In Jesus' resurrection, they were saved. In Jesus' resurrection, they would have joy. They would have joy **in a little while**.

The disciples would experience grief for a little while. Yet, **in a little while**, that grief would be gone. In talking about this, Jesus spoke about the experience of a woman having a baby. I was blessed to be there at the birth of all three of my daughters. Now, I cannot speak to the intense pain that my wife experienced, but I know she did. What I can note is the instant joy that she had. Some moments in life are remembered with a photographic memory. The births of my three daughters are certainly that way. My wife experienced terrible pain. Yet, when she got to hold Ophelia, Opal, and Ottilie, I saw her light up. A content smile of joy was on her face. Tears of joy came as she held her newborn babies. This is the illustration that Jesus used to speak about the joy that his disciples would experience **in a little while**. After a little while of grief, the disciples would experience the joy of the resurrected Lord.

Jesus spoke about the 'little while' for the disciples. First, they would experience a little while of pain. Then, **in a little while**, they would experience the wonderful joy from the resurrected Jesus. In a way, you are experiencing both sides of the 'little while.' Currently, you do not see Jesus face to face. Currently, you experience grief, pain, and sorrow. But, also, the 'little while' that the disciples looked forward to ending is over. Jesus is alive. Jesus is risen. This truth gives you joy.

So, in this 'little while,' before you see Jesus face to face in heaven and experience the full joy, you will face pain and difficulty. The Bible tells us so clearly that we will face difficulties in this life. Jesus said, "*in this life you will have trouble.*" Jesus instructs us to take up our crosses. We live in a world that is decaying as a result of sin. The Bible tells us clearly that we will face sorrow, grief, and pain.

Not only does the Bible tell us that we will experience sorrow, but your experiences testify to this as well. I do not know what personal grief and pain you all have, but I know it is there. In this sinful world, I know that trauma and pain come. What have you gone through? What are you currently experiencing? Perhaps, you are dealing with the grief of losing your spouse. Perhaps, you are dealing with the grief of abuse inflicted on you by another person. Perhaps, you are dealing with the sorrow of a lost opportunity or job. I know that many are experiencing grief.

So, consider your grief. Where do you find comfort? Where do you find joy? Too often, people turn to the wrong places to get them through the pain. They establish improper coping mechanisms. What are your coping mechanisms? Have you grabbed onto unhealthy ways to deal? Maybe you are avoiding the issue. You think that ignoring the problems will give you some sort of relief. For example, some use sleep as an unhealthy coping mechanism. If your brain is 'turned off,' you don't have to deal with it. Maybe your unhealthy coping mechanism can come as excessive eating, drinking, or spending. You are using all these things to distract from the griefs and pains of this world. These unhealthy coping mechanisms are not only unhealthy, but they can also be flat-out destructive to your spiritual welfare as you fail to look to the true source of comfort and joy amid sorrow.

Maybe, you don't fall into unhealthy coping mechanisms. Maybe, you have established some healthy ways to deal with grief. Maybe, you speak with a professional, face the problems, learn the triggers, and engage in hobbies. Yet, these healthy coping mechanisms can be destructive as well. If you think that you find lasting joy from such things amid worldly grief, you will sadly be let down. These healthy coping mechanisms may help and be proper to do, but if these alone are done, you are on a path to nothing but eternal grief.

In this little while of grief, joy comes from the resurrected Jesus. This was true for the disciples as they saw Jesus rise from the grave. This is true for you. Amid the grief you have now, you have joy in Jesus. One day, you will have this joy in full as you will be brought to heaven to be with God forever. You have this joy because Jesus lived a perfect life for you, Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and Jesus rose from the grave. The resurrected Jesus gives you joy. **In a little while**, you will experience this joy to the full. Because Jesus rose, you too will rise. Because Jesus lives, you live.

Dear Confirmands, today is a day of celebration. Yet, life on earth will not always feel like this. Today is not a day to be done and walk away from the Lord and his church. Today is a day to remember, hear, and know that amid grief, your joy is in Jesus. This is true for you, Rose, Leo, and Ron. Andrew, Danielle, Jacob, Joshia, Kailey, and Kayla, this is for you. This is true for all believers. Your grief will last but a little while. Jesus gives you joy. **In a little while**, you will experience this joy to the fullest forever in heaven. Amen.