

A Little While And I Am With You
John 16.16-23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

My friends, I have some bad news and some good news. First, the bad news, what Christ our Lord endures, the Christian also endures. The good news is that what Christ our Lord receives and gains, the Christian also receives and gains. For Christ Jesus brings and gives you both joy and sorrow, both relief and suffering.

So as Christ Jesus suffered and died, you also suffer and die. As Christ Jesus was delivered from His torment and raised to new life, you also are delivered from your torment and raised to newness of life. For we bear in our bodies both the suffering and death of our Lord, that we might also bear in our bodies our Lord Jesus Himself, His life and restoration, and the relief and comfort only He gives and brings.

Dear friends, we are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

My friends, Paul reminds us that we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor 4.8-11)

That is what Jesus means when He says "a little while" to His disciples. "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me."

It is as if Jesus had said this: "You will have a time of suffering, a time when your mind and soul are afflicted, a time when you despair of all hope and feel as if you are drowning in your own sinful addictions, a time when you are overwhelmed with guilt and feel as if there is no help from God. But it will only be for a little while. And then, a little while after that, you will see Me, your Lord and Savior. I will give you such relief and joy, I will so richly cover over your misery, I will so ease your agony and calm your restlessness and warm your heart that you will forget your anguish and no longer remember your fears and anxieties."

Twice Jesus must repeat this saying to His disciples. Twice He must say "only a little while." He says this because it is hard for them – and hard for us – to believe.

Why is it hard for us to believe? Because we operate with the mistaken notion that, because we are Christians, because we are with the Faithful, because we are religious in our thoughts and prayers and beliefs, then there should be no grief or heartache, no affliction or torment or inner turmoil. Some will even falsely teach that as Christians, everything should run smoothly and you should be cheerful and cheery all the time. After all, you are with the Lord, and He abides in you, and with God on your side, all your troubles should fade away. At least, they should not increase, and instead they should lessen and finally disappear.

But with these words "a little while," our Jesus is telling us that you bear in your own body the

marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal 6.17). This means that for a little while, you will be grieved by various trials. This happens so that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1.6-7).

It should not surprise when your heart grows cold, or when your pain overwhelms you, or when you are tempted and tried to the breaking point. For if your God and Savior suffered these things for your sake, then should you not suffer for His? To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow in His steps (1 Pet 2.21). So, instead, count it all joy when you fall into various trials. For you know that the testing of your faith produces patience (James. 1:2-3).

My friends, remember our Lord's promise: "a little while." Only a little while, and you will be relieved. Only a little while, and your tears and heartache will be replaced with laughter and joy. Only a little while, and whatever weighs you down will be lifted from you. Only a little while, and the uneasiness that distresses you will be undone and removed from you. For His anger is but for a moment, [yet] His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Ps 30.5).

That is what our Lord means when He says to the disciples, and to you, "a little while." Our problem is that we don't always see or believe that what we go through is only "a little while." All we see is this life with the obvious beginning, and what we see as an obvious end. A little while is all this life is in the grand scheme of eternity. We have a hard time not thinking that our life, from birth to grave is the long time, and the little whiles are supposed to be short times in this life.

Because of this, we are so wrapped up in our sin and grief that we do not always hear or taste the goodness and comfort and help we so desperately demand from our Lord.

Even when His consoling word is spoken right into our ears, even when Christ's own healing and life-renewing Body is placed on our tongues, even when Christ's own man says clearly and unmistakably that our sin has been covered and our torment removed, even then, we don't see that as the end of the "little while" of our adversity.

So, for us the "little while" of suffering seems to last forever, while the "little while" of joy seems so fleeting when it finally comes.

But I am here to tell you that now, today, in this place and time, is the moment of our Lord's comfort. Now is the "little while" when you see the Lord. Now is the time our Lord brings to you, and pours into you, the consolation and solace and comfort and assistance you so earnestly desire.

I urge you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6.1-2).

So, lift up your heart, and let your soul and body rejoice. For our Lord has not left you helpless, or abandoned you in your need, or left you to your own devices. He makes good on His Word. He comes to you and sees you through your distress. He ushers you through hell to heaven, from your hardship to the riches of His kingdom.

What is wonderful is that it all happens here. It is all given here. Here our Lord richly and abundantly provides for all your wants of body and soul. Here He allows you to take into yourself His own Body and life-Blood, together with all He is and has to give.

Here, then, is where you go to the Father and are with the Lord. Here, in this Divine Service is where you taste and see that the Lord is good, and that His goodness is for you, and that His mercy endures forever.

So then do not lose heart. Even though your outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For your light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. So, do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor 4.16-18).

And what is most eternal, most sure, most true, and most beneficial is our Lord and His Word in His own Body and Blood laid out now for the taking to comfort and keep you. This little while that we see Jesus today, is given to us to bring us through the little while we do not see Him, until we will see Him again for all eternity. Lord keep us through the little while of this life unto life everlasting. Amen.