**Only a Little While**

Based on [John 16:16-20](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn16.16-20)

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Fourth Sunday of Easter ~ Jubilate

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A year ago on the Fourth Sunday of easter, we did not see each other. I was recording sermons Sunday morning to be released at our usual 10am service time for those of you worshiping from home. We were all at home. Gatherings of any size were not allowed. I remember thinking that this can’t go on forever. Our society can’t suffer a social and economic lockdown for more than a little while.

Well, three waves of COVID later, we are back in church, but still in a societal lockdown of sorts. Thankfully it was only for a little while that we weren’t able to gather as christians...a little while in the scheme of things--three months or so. And we have been blessed, as a small congregation, not to have to regulate our worship attendance, or to struggle to abide by 15% of our sanctuary’s fire code limit. Some have decided to continue to stay home until the pandemic is over. Others of us have decided to gather. It is right that each of us should be convinced in his own mind about what to do. After all, even if this pandemic goes on for years, it is still only a little while when compared to eternity. For to God a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day.

Jesus says to his disciples, “**A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while and you will see me**” He might be referencing his burial, in which three days is a little while; or he might be referencing his ascension, where we see him no longer because he is ascended into heaven.

Or he might be meaning both. When God speaks of time in this way--in a little while, behold i am coming soon, the kingdom of heaven is near--it doesn’t help us to think chronologically, like counting the tickings of the clock. Yes God created the earth in six chronological days, and rested on one chronological day, but that’s because he designated the time in days. But when Jesus says “a little while” the “little” is not so much an indication of minutes, hours, days and years. It is rather an indication of the incomparable greatness of what is to come. A lake can be a large body of water...so large that you cannot see the opposite shore. But it is just a little pond compared to any of the vast oceans. So our sufferings here are little compared to the eternal joys to come.

Albert Einstein is famous for having been a genius, and having revolutionized our understanding of physics with his theories of relativity. In explaining relativity once, he supposedly put it this way: ““*When you sit with a nice girl for two hours you think it's only a minute, but when you sit on a hot stove for a minute you think it's two hours. That's relativity.*””.

When Jacob committed to working seven years to have Rachel as his bride, but the scripture says “they seemed only like a few days to him, because of his love for her.” Likewise Christ suffered six hours on the cross, but they were an eternity, because he accepted the full wrath of God for all our sins.

And after he suffered the eternal punishment of hell in our place, it was only a little while he was buried and then, he was raised. He appeared to the women, to his disciples, and as many as five hundred people at once. Carrying the marks of atonement on his hands and side, he ascended into heaven and so now we will not see him, but only for a little while. 1900 years ago, in the Revelation of St. John he said, behold I am coming soon...bringing my recompense with me. That may sound like a long time, but should he tarry another 1900 years before returning it will be as but a few days for those who have believed and found their peace in his wounds.

And this is why you need the pure spiritual milk of the word daily on your hearts and in your minds. Because, there is no hope for this world as far as the eyes can see. We are some 13 months and three waves past the time when it was announced “15 days to slow the spread of COVID.” We still can’t eat together at a restaurant, any of us. We still receive communion at the altar one person at a time.

A year ago, I was concerned how well it would be received if our church required the wearing of masks for worship, because they seemed so strange and uncomfortable. Now I hear people talking about how they will probably wear masks whenever they are sick, even after COVID. The world will never be the same, but then again it never is. Post world war, post cold war, post nine eleven, post covid. The world is always pushing past something, but where are we headed? Hoping for the world to solve its problems is exactly what St. Paul says it is..always seeking, never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. And the truth is that we will never save the world, because the world has already been saved. We only need wait, in patience and holiness, for the day to come. Christ has commanded us that in the midst of worldly panic and stress, “**Straighten up and raise your head, for your redemption draws near.”**

You know the truth, if you will only believe it and hold it in your heart above all other hope. The beauty of our hope is that it is a certainty. It is a victory already won. You cannot hasten its consummation, neither can you hinder it. You wait for it, and it will come. Jesus Chrisit has been raised from the dead, and he has the keys to death and hades. He will not drop them or misplace them, nor can the devil snatch them out of his hands. The gates of hell will not prevail against his church and all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

But how can you call upon one in whom you have not believed? And I do not mean to condemn anyone, but truly, in your struggles, in your griefs, in your very real trials and temptations of this life...where is christ? Is he there in your mind with them, in your heart...or is he far away, unable to help because you cannot see him as vividly as you can see your problems in the world. And you obsess over your present problems, because you fear what will happen if you don’t. But he sees your worries, and he knows your sorrows more intimately than you. He experienced a more profound grief, a deeper sadness, a longer struggle, a lonelier road than you. And he is never far away, and he always draws near to those who call upon him.

We are in this world a short time, and that is both chronologically and relatively speaking. Some of us live to seventy or by strength of years eighty, and others are sooner cut off. But given the unsurpassable greatness of the joy that has been revealed to us, our suffering is a day and our joy a lifetime. A mother gives birth and forgets her pain, scorning it for the joy of a child born into the world. A saviour gives his spirit and forgets his shame, scorning it for the joy set before him. And you, christian friends suffer a little while...but look past it. Set your hope to where true joys are found and no one will take your joy from you.