

Sermon: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: John 16:12-22 (v.16) Jesus said to his disciples: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me again.”

**Theme:** Embracing Changes

Dear Friends,

**Introduction:** It is easy to understand why the disciples were confused by this prophesy of Jesus. But when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them, it all made perfect sense. The question I want to ask – Have we experience a similar situation? Have you experienced a time in your life when things were going along quite nicely, then something dramatic happens, and then afterwards things are quite different, often better? In today’s sermon, I want to explore this kind of dramatic change many of us have experienced. It is often painful and confusing when it happens, but afterwards it all makes perfect sense.

1. Let us start with what Martin Luther wrote about death in a similar way. He said: *The womb of the mother is the only world that the baby knows. It is perfect for the child: warm, protected and safe. When the time comes to be born, it is very painful for the child and for the mother. But after the child is born, a new world full of light and love is presented to the child, and he/she doesn’t want to go back to the previous world anymore. So, it is with us when the time of our death comes: It’s painful and full of grief; but after we pass the tunnel, we will be with God in the new world forever!* (Free quotation from A Sermon on Preparing to Die).

It is interesting how Luther uses the example of our physical birth into this world as a metaphor for our death from this world to go to our heavenly father.

2. Another example: It can happen in our career. We have a job and all seems to be going well. Then we get a new boss, changes take place, and all of a sudden we are looking for a new job. There is great uncertainty. It seems unfair because I did not do anything wrong. We ask ourselves if we will ever get another job like it? Back in KZN, I left Nampak and joined a charity. What a change for an engineer. But I learnt so much about the great work that these dedicated staff and volunteers do every day.
3. It can happen in our relationships. The initial infatuation does not last forever. We get to know each other better and we need to make adjustments and compromises. Sometimes this is not easy. But, afterwards true love for each other shines through in the knowledge that we have a friend, companion and trusted soul mate who will be with us through good times and bad times.
4. But, do we go through this change in our faith and spiritual lives?
  - In baptism, we are accepted by God as His child.
  - In faith, we receive by grace the assurance of salvation.
  - In death, we look to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Is it as simple as that? Or do we need to dig a bit deeper?

The journey of faith is not an easy one. On Good Friday we read the text where Jesus cried out: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We read in Luke 4 that Jesus was tempted by the devil for 40 days. We all know many examples where the faith of believers is tested. And often, the deeper our faith, the more we are tempted and have to endure.

If we go through difficult times, we may be faced with the thought – I feel so alone. In our text, Jesus said “In a little while you will see me no more”. Can this also apply to me? Now? Why do I feel so alone? Why do I feel that Jesus is a million miles away? How will I ever cope? Where are my so called friends? Why is the world against me? Our text in v20 tells us that the world will rejoice. It is a sad reality that some people will be glad when we stumble, or take advantage of our hardship. This is so unfair because I did the right thing and lived a good life.

These are tough question. No one can answer them for you.

**BUT**, God made a promise. “a little while **you will see me again.**”

In v22, we read “**you will rejoice**, and no one will **take away your joy.**”

We know that difficult experiences can make us stronger. We spend quiet time in prayer and contemplation trying to figure this out and asking God for strength. We probably reach out to God the most when we feel most abandoned. We may discuss our thoughts and concerns with Pastor. I like to go for walks in the mountains to “find myself”. We all know the famous Psalm 23 “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for **you are with me**; your rod and your staff, **they comfort me.**” In these difficult times, our faith can be strengthening as we gain greater understanding and love for the message of grace and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. In our busy life, we need quiet time with God. We may feel alone and abandoned, but in reality God may be closer to us than we ever realise. We know that things which are really worthwhile are usually not easy. We must learn to be patient. And when Jesus says “a little while”, it can be 3 days, or 3 months, or however long is necessary.

So, in conclusion, change is difficult. The disciples experienced this dramatically when Jesus was crucified and was buried. We do not know what the future holds. We may feel alone and lost in difficult times. But, we have a promise from God, a promise we can count on. Jesus said: “You will see me again. No one will take away your joy.”

Amen.

***The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen***

Axel Pape, Cape Town, 14 May 2017

**Gospel Text: John 16:12-22**

Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

At this, some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?”

They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’?”

Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.