

**The Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 15, 2022**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

## **A Savior for Those who Don't Understand**

John 16:12–22

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

*Eph 1:2*

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Jesus said, “[**The Spirit of truth**] will guide you into all the truth, for He won't speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you” (vv 12–15).

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Our Gospel reading takes us backwards.

Back to the night when Jesus was betrayed.

Back to the Upper Room

where He's teaching His disciples.

In it we hear just a little bit of a longer conversation.

**“I still have many things to say to you,”**

Jesus says, **“but you cannot bear them now”** (v 12).

He has something important to teach them.

He has something important to teach the Church.

He has something important to teach *us*

as we confess Jesus Christ as our Lord.

We're given a picture of how God deals with a lack of understanding.

### I.

The disciples don't understand Jesus.

They're confused.

They don't get what He's saying.

Just don't get it.

Of course, this isn't new.

It's been an ongoing issue throughout the Gospels.

The Ladies who were at yesterday's LWML Rally heard the same thing in John 14.

As Jesus was teaching,

**Thomas said, “Lord, we don’t know where You are going.**

**How can we know the way?”** (Jn 14:5)

And then **Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it’s enough for us”** (Jn 14:8),’

And a little later **Judas** (not Judas Iscariot but a different Judas) **said,**

**“Lord, how is it that You will show Yourself to us,  
and not to the world?”** (Jn 14:22).

And there’s the reading we heard today from John 16.

The disciples don’t understand.

You can hear it in what they say to one another.

They whisper, **“What’s this that He says to us?**

**“What does He mean?**

**“We don’t even know what He’s talking about!”** (v 18).

Afraid to raise their hand.

Nervous to ask.

They don’t get it.

How can they?

There are things in the faith which are beyond our understanding.

Such as, for the disciples:

The meaning of what Jesus is about to do is beyond them.

The meaning of His death and resurrection

is beyond what they would’ve known or expected of the Messiah.

But even after the resurrection, it still happens.

In Acts we heard how St. Peter didn’t get

what it meant to make disciples of all nations.

Including Gentiles in the kingdom of God was beyond His comprehension.

Sometimes you just wonder what Jesus sees in them . . .

## II.

Of course, it’s not like confusion was only a first-century problem.

We have plenty of questions, too.

Sometimes we’re even willing to ask them.

I think of the hands that shoot up in Bible class.

You have questions about the reading or about what’s being taught.

Things that you don’t immediately understand.

I have questions, too.  
There are things that confuse me and leave me scratching my head.  
But for every question that's asked,  
    I wonder how many more questions are out there.  
How many Christians are like Jesus' disciples —  
    not able to understand but also afraid to raise their hand?

A bit strange, isn't it?  
We're gathered with other Christians around the Scriptures  
    for the sake of learning,  
    and yet afraid to ask a question.

Of course it also happens in our own personal reading of Scripture.  
Have you ever known a Christian who reads something in the Bible  
    that doesn't make sense?  
They look at the study notes for help,  
    but those turn out to be unhelpful or confusing.  
It's been said that study Bibles are great at answering the questions  
    no one's asking!  
An exaggeration, of course, but point taken.

### III.

The point isn't just that we need to get better at understanding what Jesus says.  
Instead, John offers us a picture of how Jesus deals with a lack of understanding  
    among His disciples.

**Jesus knew they wanted to ask Him** about what He was saying (v 19).  
But they didn't.  
They were nervous or afraid.

So what does Jesus do?  
He doesn't lay into them.  
He doesn't mock them or call them stupid.  
He speaks to His disciples who don't understand.  
And He offers us a picture of how God deals with the lack of understanding.

Jesus addresses a lack of understanding by offering a promise.  
He promises His disciples that He will send His Holy Spirit.

He says, “[The Spirit of truth] will guide you into all the truth,  
 for He won’t speak on His own authority,  
 but whatever He hears He will speak,  
 and He will declare to you the things that are to come.  
 He will glorify Me,  
 for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.  
 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said  
 that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you” (vv 12–15).

There are things they can’t bear to know now.  
 Things they aren’t yet ready for.  
 Things they can’t comprehend.  
 But Christ promises to be with them during the time when they lack understanding.  
 And He promises to send His Spirit to continue to guide them into truth.

Notice that Jesus doesn’t offer immediate revelation.  
 He doesn’t make the mysteries of God fully understandable.  
 There are things in the faith which are beyond our understanding.

#### IV.

There’s no requirement for Christians to have complete understanding  
 of all God’s ways.  
 We trust the promise of Jesus.  
 That’s what makes us Christians.  
 He will send the Spirit.  
 Through the Word, the Spirit will lead people to all truth.

Jesus doesn’t require us or anyone to check their reason at the door.  
 We don’t follow blindly.  
 We do seek to understand.

Jesus sees our questioning.  
 He encourages the disciples and us to continue seeking the will and ways of God.

Don’t despair if you find things hard to understand.  
 Don’t give up.  
 Go further up and further in.  
 Keeping asking.  
 Being a Christian isn’t a momentary thing.  
 It’s the work of a lifetime.

Jesus is patient with us.

What Jesus does here with the disciples is important.  
It's important for us as Christians.  
It's important for the Church as she encounters a culture  
farther and farther away from the things of God.

Some people turn away from Christianity for the wrong reasons.  
They may assume that it requires complete understanding.  
They may think that you have to set your reason aside in order to believe.  
Not so.

We're not saved because we completely understand all things.  
And we're not saved because we blindly follow anything.

We're saved because Jesus sees us in our confusion  
and has mercy on us in our time of need.

His love is made known in suffering.  
He suffers for the sins of those who believe they understand better than God.  
He suffers for the sins of those who believe there's no truth when it comes to God.  
He suffers for those who in their pride and ignorance reject Him.

Jesus dies for those who lack understanding.

But He rises because of God's total understanding.  
Because God understands what His people need.  
Because God desires to give us what we need.  
Jesus dies and rises to bring the eternal mystery of salvation to His people.

And, because it's a mystery,  
there will always be a tension.  
We will understand, but not completely.  
For now, we see through a glass dimly.

And, for us, Jesus offers His promise.  
He will send His Spirit who, through the Word, will guide us into all truth.  
With that promise, we live in the tension,  
with the questions,

with incomplete understanding.

With that promise, we keep learning and growing in the faith.

And we have this assurance:

Whether we understand more or less of what Jesus says,  
He sees us.

You can be confident of His care for you until He comes again.

**“I will see you again,” Jesus says,**

**“and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (v 22).**

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ  
Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

<sup>16</sup> "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." <sup>17</sup> So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" <sup>18</sup> So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." <sup>19</sup> Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup> So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.