

Pentecost C 05 June 2022
John 14:8-27
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus promises: *"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."* Let's pray:

If there's one thing that defines Pentecost, and is also its greatest comfort, it's Jesus' promise: "I will not leave you orphaned." Who doesn't need to hear these words? They speak directly to our greatest fears and challenges; abandonment and isolation, loneliness, vulnerability, anxiety. They remind us that we're not destined to walk this earth without identity or direction. Indeed, the Holy Spirit makes sure we have both. He reminds us that we are made in God's image and are his children, and he guides and teaches us as we follow Jesus. We aren't alone.

Sure, there are seasons of life, moments when changes and tragedies can leave us feeling orphaned. Whether spoken or unspoken the questions arise. What will I do now? Where do I go? What happens next? Who will love, nurture, and guide me? Who's got my back? What will become of me? Those are the orphan's questions. Those are the questions I imagine running through the heads and hearts of the disciples in today's gospel as they begin to grasp the enormity of what Jesus is declaring to them.

The setting is the last supper. The disciples have been fed, feet have been washed, Judas has slunk off into the shadows. It's night-time, dark, and Jesus announces somewhat cryptically that he's leaving. The One for whom the disciples left everything now says he's going away; he's leaving them. "We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" "Show us the Father." More orphan questions.

I'm sure our two children felt the same way when Kathy and I sat down and told them that we'd all be moving to Adelaide for five years of seminary.

“What will it be like? Where will we live? Where will we go to school? We don’t know anyone there. What will happen to us?” The feeling of being an orphan is real. The orphan’s questions are certainly buried deep within the hearts and minds of millions of Ukrainians and a hundred million other displaced people worldwide. Think of those affected by the recent tragedy at the elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. Consider also, the homeless on our own streets. “Are we alone? Are we nothing but content for the evening news? Where will we go? How do we move forward and rebuild? What’s next? Who will go with us? Who will help us? Who will hold our hand?”

Anyone who has ever loved and lost a spouse, a child, a friend, familiarity, security, hope – knows the orphan’s questions.

We fear becoming orphaned because deep down we know that by ourselves we’re not enough. It’s not because we’re somehow deficient. It’s because we were never created or intended to be self-sufficient. We were never intended to stand alone as individuals. We were created to love and be loved, to live in relationship as people giving ourselves to each other, to dwell, abide, and remain within each other just as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father; the very antithesis of being orphaned.

“I will not leave you orphaned.” That’s the promise. To you; to me; and today, Jesus has staked another claim. With those powerful words from [Isaiah 43], Jesus says, “[Laddie,] I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you,... Do not fear, for I am with you.” Regardless of the circumstances of our lives: storms, death, anxiety, addiction, separation, grief, loss, we have never been and will never be orphaned by God.

We accept that as Gospel truth. God, by his very Being and holiness, can’t lie. Yet, I can understand why Jesus must have sounded confusing to the disciples. In the same conversation Jesus tells them that he is leaving and coming. Leaving and coming sound like opposites to me. It’s easy to get stuck trying to unravel or figure it out, but it’s not meant to be figured out. Rather, it’s meant to challenge us to think, see, and live in a different way. Even though we’re apart from Jesus as the first disciples knew him, the Holy Spirit keeps us alive in him and he in us forever.

Leaving and coming. Absence and presence. We mustn't see them as mutually exclusive, rather; we must hold them in tension. This confronts us with the question of whether Jesus, for us, is a past memory or a present reality; a sentimental story that makes us feel good or a living God who challenges, guides, and nurtures our life?

According to Jesus, the litmus test is whether we live according to his commandment to love. The commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves, to love our enemies, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Whose feet do we wash and whose feet do we ignore? What boundaries do we put on love?

Do we keep the commandments? Is our love growing, expanding, transforming of ourselves and the world? If so, Jesus is a present reality for us and we know the fulfillment of his promise that we're not left orphaned. If, however, we refuse to love; if we harbour bitterness, hatred, and deceit; if we remain self-enclosed and isolated, we relegate ourselves and each other to the orphanages of this world. Jesus' promise is always real and he remains faithful. Will we embrace his love, trust his promises, follow his guidance and teaching?

Keeping the commandments is our access to Jesus' promise that he'll not abandon us. Keeping the commandments doesn't make Jesus present to us. It makes us present to the ongoing reality of Jesus' presence. The commandments don't earn us Jesus' love they remind us how to love and the priorities of our love for him and our neighbour; a love that originates in his abiding love and presence within us.

Every time we expand the boundaries of our love, we shrink the orphanages of this world. Love creates space within us where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit make their home.

"I will not leave you orphaned." Over and over, day after day, regardless of what is happening in our lives, that is Jesus' promise. We haven't been abandoned. So we mustn't abandon ourselves or others to the orphanages of this world. Love with all that you are and all that you have even as the Father and Jesus love us with all that they are and all that they have. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will never leave you orphaned, in Christ Jesus. Amen.