

**Sermon for Easter VI Year A 2020**  
*I will Not Leave You Orphaned*

*“I will not leave you orphaned.”*

At some point we all want or even need to hear these words. They speak directly to some of our greatest fears and challenges; abandonment and isolation, loneliness, vulnerability. They remind us that we are not destined to walk this earth without an identity or direction. We do not stand alone.

To be sure there are seasons of life, moments, when the transitions, changes, and tragedies can leave us feeling as orphans. Whether spoken or unspoken the questions begin:  
What will I do now?  
Where do I go?  
What happens next?  
Who will love, nurture, and guide me?  
Who stands on my side?  
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 that night. It is the last supper. Disciples have been fed, feet have been washed, the betrayer has left. It is night, dark, and Jesus announces he is leaving. The one for whom they left everything now says he is leaving. “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” “Show us the Father.” More orphan questions.

The feeling of being an orphan is real.  
Certainly, the orphan's questions are buried deep within the fear  
and sorrow witnessing so much suffering, sickness and death  
in these days of Covid-19.

What will we do?  
What will happen to us?  
How do we move forward?  
Who will protect us?  
What's next?

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

We fear becoming orphaned.  
That fear points to the deeper reality  
that by ourselves we are not enough.  
It is not, however, because we are deficient.  
It is rather because we were never intended  
or created 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 persons giving themselves to each other,  
to dwell, abide, and remain within each other  
even 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 is the promise.  
Regardless of the circumstances of our lives,  
storms, death, separation—whether chosen or not,  
we have never been and will never be orphaned by God.

How strange that must have sounded to the disciples.  
In the same conversation Jesus tells them that he is leaving and coming.  
Leaving and coming sure sound like opposites.

If we are not careful we will get stuck  
trying to reconcile or figure this out.  
It is not, however, something to figure out.  
It is rather a means to see and live in a different way.

Leaving and coming.  
Presence and Absence.  
These must be held in tension, but not as mutually exclusive.  
That is what Jesus has set before us in today's gospel.  
That tension 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 experience that challenges, guides, and nurtures our life.

According to Jesus the answer to that question  
is determined by love  
that is revealed and fulfilled in keeping his commandments.  
The commandment to love our neighbor 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 to ignore?  
What are the boundaries of love?

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments . . .*  
Do we keep the commandments?  
If our gospel passage for today ended with Jesus' call to obedience,  
I would despair.  
But, thanks be to God, there is the promise:  
*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,  
to be with you forever.*  
*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.*

We don't have to love all by ourselves.  
We don't have to do the impossible on our own.

Jesus' desire is not that we wear ourselves out,  
trying to conjure love from our own meager resources.

The Advocate is God's own Spirit,  
God's own heart, living within us.  
This spirit, Jesus promises us, will be in us,  
making possible the presence of Christ in, with, and through us.  
This Spirit will abide within and among us,  
creating holy habitations where authentic,  
self-giving love can take root and flourish.  
The Spirit's resources are inexhaustible.  
Long after our natural stores are depleted,  
the Spirit of God will love in, among, and through us.

As is so often the case in our lives as Christians,  
Jesus' commandment leads us straight to paradox:  
we are called to action via rest.  
Called to give the love we have first received.  
Called to become the beloved children we are.  
The commandment—or better yet, the invitation—  
is to take-in all the love that God in Christ has for us  
and let it spill over to bless the world  
and then return again and again  
to the One in whom we live, and breath, and have our being—  
This is the rhythm of our life as Martin Luther so long ago pointed out—  
each day dying to sin and rising again to new life in Christ.

*I will not leave you orphaned . . .*  
is just another way that Jesus is telling us—  
*I am with you always . . .*

Over and over, day after day, regardless of what is happening in our  
lives and in our world—that is Jesus' promise.  
We have not been abandoned.  
So do not abandon yourselves or others to the orphanages of this world.

Let God's love live in you and through you  
because the love we are commanded to share  
is the love we are endlessly given.

Let us pray.

*Spirit of the living God, move among us all;*

*make us one in heart and mind,*

*make us one in love:*

*humble, caring, unselfish, and sharing.*

*Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with your love.*

Amen.