

# I Will Not Leave You Desolate

John 14:15-21

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

May 17, 2020 – Sixth Sunday of Easter



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Imagine a child, lost and alone in the middle of Disneyland, with no one to watch over or protect him. Though he is surrounded by countless thousands of others who are well-meaning, the security and comfort of his parents' presence is what he really needs. So, falling into a tearful fit, choked up with raw emotion, he cries out: "I want my mommy and daddy!" Children, of course, are more open about their feelings than adults. You and I, we aren't as likely to break out in tears if we get lost in an amusement park. But that doesn't mean we don't have fears. Indeed, we have fears that go down to the depths of our soul, even if we aren't willing to admit it.

One fear common to us all is that we might be all alone in this universe. We wonder what would happen should we find out that there's no God to wipe away our tears or take us home to Himself when this life is over. Indeed, is *this* not the cry of the unbeliever who's lost in grief over the death of a loved one – indeed, *our* cry in times of suffering, stress and doubt? We may fill our lives with all kinds of diversions to try to bring an end to such feelings, but the very fact that we surround ourselves with distractions is itself a cry of insecurity – an indicator that we don't want to be all alone or abandoned here in this world.

In today's Gospel Jesus is reaching out to comfort His disciples who were afraid – and not only the disciples of His own day and time, but the disciples of our day, as well – for we *all* have fears and doubts about our faith – about our overall role in God's plan – about our place in God's Kingdom. So listen to Jesus' promise: "I *will not* leave you desolate!" These words were spoken just after our Lord told His disciples what was soon going to happen on Calvary's cross. Yet even with that assurance, fear and doubt still assailed them – so much so that Thomas earlier

blurted out: "Lord we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus knew what was about to happen would cause His followers to worry and doubt. His arrest, trial, crucifixion, death, and burial – as well as the persecution they would endure – would leave them feeling unsure and abandoned. Even though His Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost would soon follow, these disciples of Jesus would still be wrought with fear. And that's precisely how people feel today. When you're sick or suffering, when someone close to you dies, when a tornado drops out of the sky and destroys your every earthly possession, when the world gets stricken with a pandemic event, there is going to be a *big* hole in your life. That's when you are at your most vulnerable, because deep down inside you don't really think anyone understands what you're going through.

That's when you might believe falsely that you have no options. And while you might rationally grasp the truth that in this life there will be trouble, when it begins to pile up and overwhelm you, it *can* all seem futile and insignificant. You might even feel as if you're losing your grip. Still, even in the midst of all this there *is* Good News! Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has already been where you are! *He* knows *exactly* how you feel, because He is the One who was the *most abandoned* of all – the One who suffered the *total* rejection of God as He hung on the cross and cried out: "My God, My God, why have *You* forsaken Me?" *Nobody* understands abandonment like Jesus! *Nobody* understands forsakenness like Jesus! *Nobody* understands what it means to be "alone" like Jesus! And it's *precisely* because He understands what this is like, that He can come to you and say: "I *will not* leave you desolate!"

And Jesus *has not* abandoned you! He sent the Holy Spirit to fill the hole created in your heart when He ascended back into Heaven. This is the

Spirit of Truth, and He can only be received by faith – the kind of faith our Lord Jesus gives. This Spirit is given to you by Christ so that in His absence you'll have another Counselor, Mediator and Helper to be with you. This is what Paul was talking about in Romans, when he wrote: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And He who searches the hearts of men knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Even when incapacitated by illness or injury – even when you can't utter so much as a prayer for yourself – the Spirit is still there making intercession for you! **This** is the gift Jesus gives in Holy Baptism! **This** is how He keeps His promise never to leave His children desolate. Through the Word, Baptism, Absolution, and the Holy Supper of Christ's very own body and blood, we are constantly being filled with the Spirit of truth so that we will not be alone. And because we aren't alone, our lives aren't subject to the whims of fate. You **aren't** a spiritual nobody going nowhere. There **is** a purpose for your life. Knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells within you, you **can** confidently say with St. Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor **anything else** in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

Because of this indwelling Holy Spirit, **you** can joyfully confess: "Jesus will come again!" For even in this morning's Gospel, as Jesus was speaking to His followers about leaving them, His promise was that He would return. Jesus kept that promise by staying with them for forty days following His resurrection. And even now those

who follow Jesus also share in His resurrection – a real flesh and blood, physical resurrection. For just as death was temporary for our Savior, it is likewise temporary for all who follow Him! One day those who have trusted in Christ will see their loved ones again in the flesh, for God has made us physical **and** spiritual beings – and on the Last Day our glorified, resurrected bodies **will be** reunited with our souls – for God's promise is that He **will not** abandon us to death and the grave!

Jesus came to remove desolation from your life – and **this** He continues to do as He comes to you who belong to Him in the gift of faith – saving you from your sin, comforting you with His Holy Spirit, and shaping you by the power of His Word. You have not been abandoned to live a life of lawlessness – not knowing what is or isn't God-pleasing. Rather Jesus has taught you already what you should and should not do to please both Him and the Father. And while the world doesn't know what pleases God because it refuses to hear Jesus' voice – you who follow Jesus know what pleases Him – and what pleases Him is that you trust what He says.

Even as Jesus spoke the words of this text at Table on that first Maundy Thursday before His crucifixion, the events which would take Him the cross were already in motion. The time would soon come when His followers would actually believe that He had failed in His Messianic mission – that He had abandoned them. But on Easter He returned to deliver on His promise – and that promise is also intended for you and for me. Therefore my prayer for you today is that you might **always** have confidence that this is true! The Spirit given to you in Baptism tells you so. And so does our living Lord and Savior, when He says: "I **will not** leave you desolate." Thanks be to God for His great and abundant mercy. Amen!

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.