

Rev. Luke C. Werre
Peace, Sun Prairie
May 2, 2005
Easter 6

John 14:15-21

CHRIST DOES NOT LEAVE US AS ORPHANS

An 80-year-old man I know grew up in an orphanage. His mother was very much alive but claimed that she could not afford to keep him. At first she would visit him every Sunday. He would dress up and wait for her. It didn't take long and every now and then she wouldn't show up. After a while she stopped coming altogether. He said in a way it would have been better for him if he had never known his mother at all –less painful.

Imagine how the disciples were feeling at the news that Christ was going to leave them. They had put all their eggs in this one basket. Remember how Christ told them to leave everything and follow Him? And on top of that now they were singled out. They had the whole world against them, literally out to kill them –especially their own religious leaders! Imagine their bewilderment, their horror, their grief, the sense of utter helplessness and futility of everything the next day when their dear Master was bound and crucified. Talk about being orphaned!

Christ prepared them for His death and resurrection and He also prepared them for the rest of their earthly lives as Christians with the comforting words, “I will not leave you as orphans.” Last week we heard Jesus say that He is the way to the Father. Even though Jesus has ascended into heaven we should not think of Him as waiting around up there for us to find Him somehow. He is the way to the Father but the Father is not satisfied to sit back and wait for us. He finds us and comes to us with real help and real comfort. From this portion of His Word let us consider that Christ does not leave us as orphans. By His own promise we know first, the Counselor comes to us, and secondly, Christ Himself comes to us.

As Jesus spoke to His disciples in the Upper Room He stated a truism: “*If you love me, you will guard what I instruct.*” This is not a condition like “First, you have to prove your love for me and then I'll help you.” It is simply a fact that as believers love their Savior they will treasure what their Savior says and also live by it. If we didn't love Him it would be useless for Him command us to do anything anyway.

Believing in Christ, loving Christ, banking on His promises and living by His words sets Christians up for all kinds of punishment in this life. Jesus Himself said, “*No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*” The disciples and all the earliest Christians soon found out what that was like: whippings, imprisonment, property being confiscated, being hunted down, being taken to court, being executed, violent demonstrations and all sorts of business and political intrigues against them. Within the congregations self-appointed leaders peddled false doctrines and dragged the apostles' reputations through the mud. Supposed fellow believers got nasty to each other. All the most powerful, impressive and well-established churches and synagogues damned and condemned them.

The world has not changed since then. You are really an odd duck if you use a little discretion in what movies you let your children watch, in what religious activity you participate in, in the way you talk or in whether you are making God-pleasing choices. Jesus said things will get so bad it will be a miracle that any believers are left in the world when He returns. Perhaps we often feel like the man in the Bible named Lot, a resident of Sodom, whom we are told was tortured in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.

How can we keep going against so much opposition? How can we not lose our faith and our salvation? We are so weak we tend to fall in line with the world more often than not. How could the disciples endure everything that was thrown at them and still not fall away from Christ? Christ has promised that He does not leave us as orphans. The Counselor comes to us.

Jesus said, *“If you love me you will guard what I instruct. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever –the Spirit of truth.”* Last week, in the same dialog, we heard Jesus say He *is* the Truth. Now He says He will send the Spirit of truth to be our Counselor. That word literally means someone who is called to your side and will stand by you. This Counselor is better than any parent because as Jesus said, *“He will be with you forever.”*

To paraphrase Jesus, *“Here is strength and comfort for you much better than my limited, temporary visible presence with you here on earth. After my death and resurrection, when I ascend into heaven and assume the authority over all things that belongs to me, I will send you this Counselor who will never leave you.”*

And what does the Holy Spirit counsel us with? He counsels us with the forgiveness of sins because of Christ’s sufferings and death on the cross. He convinces us that for Jesus’ sake our heavenly Father has forgiven us even for our weakness when we’ve been more in line with the world than with His holy will. If that is this Counselor’s job and objective, then our heavenly Father certainly must not be harboring any ill will toward us or have any intentions to permit lasting harm to come our way. Through the message of God’s forgiveness the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in the first place and now remains with us to keep us in the true faith and to save us for eternity.

Perhaps a person can hardly believe this. So many other types of Christians appear to be so much more filled with the Holy Spirit, so much more alive in their faith, so much more joyful than me! Me –I hardly feel anything except my tiredness, my sorrows, my burdens, my unwholesome urges, my anxieties, my fears... Dear Christian friend, believe what Christ says, that He ascended into heaven for the very purpose of sending you this Counselor. He said, *“The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know hi, for he lives with you and will be in you.”* There, you have His promise.

If you have any further doubt, consider the fact that Christ Himself does not sit back in heaven and relax. By His own promise Christ does not leave us as orphans because Christ Himself comes to us.

He said to His disciples, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me.”* Jesus did show Himself physically to His disciples on a number of occasions after He rose from the dead. So He adds this comfort: *“Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you.”* Christ’s death is our death. Christ’s life is our life. Through faith in Christ we are united to Him, and He is united to His heavenly Father. Think of how He gives us proof of this in the Lord’s Supper. He Himself, the Champion and Ruler over all, comes to us, body and blood, and permits Himself to be received by us –taken into us.

If Christ Himself comes to us in such a real way, as He says He does, surely He is not lying then when He promises to send us His Spirit either. As orphans we would have nothing, but through faith in Christ we have everything. In ourselves we are sinful, but in Christ we are justified. In ourselves we feel death, but in Christ we have indestructible life. In ourselves we feel conflict, but in Christ we have peace. In ourselves we feel everyone else’s disapproval, but in Christ we are blessed and saved. For if Christ Himself comes to us, then He brings all of His life-saving power and blessings to us.

Jesus added, *“Whoever has my instructions and guards them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.* Even the best parent can sometimes temporarily forget to come back and pick up their child. But Christ does not leave us as orphans because He will not forget to come back, as He has been coming to us regularly in the Sacrament. But in the Last Day He will come visibly to us to take us with Him to our heavenly home. No, we are not orphans in this world. We have Christ.