

29 May 2011
Easter 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“I Will Not Leave You as Orphans”

Text: John 14:15-21 (Acts 17:16-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*]

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

I don't know if there is a sadder thing to see in our world than an orphan - a child left without a father and mother to care for her, to love him. Orphans aren't as visible in our country today as years ago, because we don't have institutions called “orphanages” anymore. But they're still around. Tornadoes and floods in the midwest, car accidents, crime, 9-11, the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and as we remember this Memorial Day weekend, parents who lose their lives serving our country - all leave behind orphans. Yet perhaps saddest of all are the children who are orphaned simply because their parents didn't want them.

When God created the world and decided to populate the world not all at once with the simultaneous creation of a million people, but through families - parents who take part in the procreative process and have and raise children - orphans were not part of the picture. It is sin and death that creates orphans. It is sin and death that rips families apart. It is sin and death that makes our lives less than God intended them to be, in so many ways.

And so how appropriate that the One who has come to atone for our sin and defeat our death - the very sin and death that creates orphans - today, we heard, makes the promise: ***I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*** You know, he is the only person who could ever say that. We can't, because we don't know. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We don't know when our end is going to come. But Jesus knew. He knew that the time for the cross had come, and that His disciples would feel like orphans - frightened and alone. But He also knew that the resurrection would follow, and that He would come to them. ***I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*** I don't think the disciples fully understood those words yet - but they would. They are truly words to hang your faith on.

But the devil is an orphan-maker, and he wants to make an orphan of you. He does

not want you to believe this Word of Jesus, this promise, but instead to believe that God has left you. Maybe because of your sin. For look at you! You don't deserve a heavenly Father. What have you done for Him? You don't even think about Him half the time, do you? . . . And what did Jesus say today? **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."** But you don't, do you? You love yourself, your things, your life, more than Him, and it shows in your life, doesn't it? I know it does mine. . . . And the Holy Spirit? Well, where's the evidence of Him in your life? You don't feel very spirit-filled, do you? . . . See? You can't count on God. Look at the tragedies in the world. Look at the troubles in your life. If you're not an orphan, who is?

The devil makes a convincing case, doesn't he? He good at arguing, and logic, and pointing out our sins.

But here's the thing: **God's love for you defies logic.** It *doesn't* make sense. It isn't a love of this world. It isn't earned. And there's always more of it. God's *agape* love. His self-giving love. His undeserved love. His love that would cause Him to send His Son to die for your sins. All of them, not one excluded, no matter how small or how large. And then to send you - as our reading said today - **another Helper, to be with you forever.** The word there for "Helper" is the word *Paraklete*, which is very hard to translate into English. It means Helper, Comforter, Advocate, Counselor, Guide, Defender - all those things rolled into one. And so, perhaps, given all those meanings, we could translate it this way: *the one who will give you whatever you need*; and who, as Jesus says, will be with you and do so, *forever*.

Which means you're no orphan!

But, the devil breaks in at this point and says: maybe, just maybe, that's true. But you blew it! Jesus did come to you, and He did send the Holy Spirit to you, but you blew it. You rejected Him with your sin and unholiness and idolatry. Maybe He did all those things, but you left Him and made an orphan of yourself.

Another good argument, Mr. Devil. And it doesn't take long to look around in the world today and see lots of people living as prodigal sons, as spiritual orphans. And to see people living like those St. Paul dealt with in the Areopagus - not really knowing who God is, listening to all the new ideas of the world, chasing fads and gimmicks, being spiritual but not godly. We don't have to wait to see those TV commercials of orphans from Africa who need our help to see orphans - they're living right next door to us. Quite right, Mr. Devil.

But here's where you're wrong: Jesus didn't just come for us one time, and He doesn't just send the Spirit to us once - He is coming to us all the time, and sending the Spirit all the time. A continual giving of Himself for us. For the Spirit isn't our

possession, a dove to try to keep in the cage of our lives - but the continual self-giving of God for us. His ongoing coming to us and for us. And so Jesus words are really more like: *I will be asking the Father . . . and He will be giving you another Helper . . . and I will be coming to you . . . and you will be living, and loving and keeping.*

And that really is the Christian life. We sometimes think (wrongly!) of the Christian life like jumper cables - that God jump starts us and gives us spiritual life and then we take off and go. But no - the Christian life is really a *continual* receiving from our Lord; a continual connection, with Him providing us with all that we need, from the smallest babies, to the oldest adults, and at every stage in between. ***I will not leave you as orphans; I will be coming to you.***

And He is. That's why Jesus ascended into heaven, as we will commemorate on Wednesday night. Jesus didn't ascend to leave us, but to fulfill His promise to be with us always. Not just in one place at one time, but in all places at all times. And He didn't ascend because His work was done, but to continue His work for us.

And He is. Working, coming, praying, sending. Coming in the waters of Holy Baptism and raising those dead in sin to new life in Him and His resurrection. Coming in His Word to teach us the truth, that we not listen to all the new ideas of the world and chase after the latest fads and gimmicks, but be filled with His Word and truth. And coming to us in His Supper, the food of His Body and Blood, to feed and strengthen the new life He has given us. And in all these ways coming not alone, but with His Spirit, to be dwelling with you and living in you and joining you to God and His life and forgiveness.

For though the devil's right - we blew it and continue to blow it with our sins, the Father welcomes back and forgives us prodigals, Jesus has compassion on us who are like sheep without and Shepherd and so is for us our Good Shepherd, and the Spirit comes to us as our Helper, our Comforter, our Advocate, our Defender, our Guide, our Counselor - our Paraklete. That you may know the truth of your sin, yes, and repent, and know the even greater love of God for you. That you are no orphan, but a child who is loved even more than you can even imagine.

And that love given is now the love you live. ***If you love me***, Jesus said, ***you will keep my commandments.*** Does that mean: if you love me you will obey the Ten Commandments? Yes, for the Ten Commandments teach us what true love is. But it means much more than that. For the word *keep* there doesn't just mean *obey* - it means to hold onto, to guard, to treasure. And what we hold onto, guard, and treasure is the *whole Word of God* - all that Jesus has said to us, and all that He is for us. And how we hold onto, guard, and treasure Jesus and His Word is by faith. The very faith the Spirit has given to you and is keeping in you. And so the Christian

life is a constant receiving by faith what our Lord is constantly giving, and then living the life and love and forgiveness you are receiving.

That's not easy, and, as Peter said, you may suffer for it. Yes, you may suffer for doing good. Which, again, the devil will then try to twist to make you think you're an orphan when you're not, or to get you to throw your hands up and give up, but don't. But at just such times, remember Jesus' promise, that He is sending you a Paraklete. He didn't promise Him because you weren't going to need Him, but exactly because He knew you would! Because of the attacks of the devil. Because of the struggles of this world and life that wear you down and wear you out. Because of the sadness and fears that rise up within you. Jesus knows them all. He lived them. And so to you He has made this wonderful promise: *I will not leave you as orphans; I will be coming to you . . . and I will be praying for you . . . and I will be sending you a Paraklete, to be with you forever.*

And He is. Which is why you are here. He knows that not a day goes by when we do not need Him. And so He comes. For you, to you, and now through you to others.

For you are no orphan! No, you are dearly loved. Don't let the devil deceive you or mislead you into despair, but fill your ears with Jesus' Word, your mouths with His food, your hearts with His love, and your lives with His forgiveness. For truly He is coming to you and sending you His Spirit. *You are no orphan.* He is here, for you.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.