

21 May 2017
Easter 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“A Forever Helper”

Text: John 14:15-21 (1 Peter 3:13-22)

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia! **And He is sending you another Helper.**

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, Jesus says to His disciples. It kind of sounded like that last week, though. For, Jesus said, I am leaving. *I am going to prepare a place for you.* And while, yes, He said *But I will come back for you . . .* what about in the meantime? *What are we going to do until He returns?* the disciples were probably wondering. It's a cold, harsh world. It's a dangerous, deceptive world. It's a world that crucifies, beheads, and persecutes. We might not make it.

And they probably were wondering that because, even though it doesn't say it here, what often happens with Jesus is that He gives answers to what people are thinking before they speak. He gives answers to what people are thinking but are afraid to say. We read it over and over in the Gospels: *Jesus knew what they were thinking and so said . . .*

So here, too. Yes, I am leaving, going to prepare a place for you, but until I come back you won't be on your own; you won't be orphans. You will have ***another Helper. To be with you forever.*** Who will never leave you. And who is it? ***The Spirit of truth.*** You know Him as the Holy Spirit (v. 26). The third person of the Holy Trinity. And He will not only ***dwelt with you***, Jesus says, but ***in you***. Wherever you are He will be. To help. To help you.

Now to be sure, we have other helpers in this world. *But they will all fail us.* Sooner or later, they will not be there when we need them. Or they will be there but let us down, or not be able to do what we need. And often at the worst possible times. Friends (both real and virtual), family, spouses, doctors, government, teachers, professors, even pastors, district presidents, and synodical presidents - they're sinners, all, and so they will all let us down; they will all fail.

And they will not be with us forever. Nothing in this world is. Sin has seen to that, too. The sin that has brought fallenness has also brought separation and death into this world. And in fact, things in this world seem to be passing away now faster than ever. Things

that are here today are either gone or obsolete tomorrow.

But it's not even just people - other *things* in this world that we turn to as helpers will also let us down. Whether that helper is found in a bottle, a pill, or an injection; on the internet, or anywhere else.

And as if all that's not bad enough, there's this too: *you will fail you, too*. And you will fail others. You cannot even depend on yourself. Maybe least of all yourself. For consider the first sentence of the Holy Gospel we heard today, when Jesus said: ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments***. *How ya' doin' with that?* We say we love God, but honestly, how many times in a day do you even think of God or keeping His commandments? How often are you too busy to pray or gladly hear and learn God's Word and live by it? How often are you too busy or too self-absorbed to help the people you run into every day? How often are you not even worried about the good you fail to do, the words you could have spoken but didn't, the fact that - as the liturgy of Private Absolution puts it: *I have lived as if God did not matter, and as if I mattered most?* That's all I need to say. That line right there convicts me every time.

Put that all together, and you know: **we need help. We need a Helper.**

And today, we hear that we have one. ***I will ask the Father***, Jesus says, ***and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever . . . I will not leave you as orphans***. That's not a maybe; that's a promise. A promise that came to pass for the disciples at Pentecost, which we will celebrate in just a couple of weeks now. And it came to pass for you when you were baptized. There in that water, you received a Helper, the Helper, to be with you always.

Now, you may not understand how the Holy Spirit helps you very much. He doesn't put food on your table or money in your pocket, right? . . . *Or does He?* But maybe there's something we need even more . . . something we need *first* . . . something without which all the food and money in the world really doesn't do much good . . .

And that's Jesus. The first way, the most important way the Helper helps you is by pointing you to Jesus and giving you Jesus. That once you realize that ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments*** isn't true for you, to see that it is true for Jesus. That because He loves you, He did keep all the commandments. Perfectly. For you. In your place. All the time. What you couldn't do, He did for you. That in the end your account not come up short, but be filled with His good. And then also because He loves you He laid down His life for you - all your sins, misdeeds, and failures held against Him and not against you. And that we call forgiveness.

And the picture of that is what we are celebrating all this Easter season. The cross is the picture of your sin, the empty tomb the picture of your forgiveness. The cross - bondage

and death - what you deserve; the empty tomb - freedom and release - what you're given. Given by the Holy Spirit. For what Jesus did for you and earned for you is given to you by the Holy Spirit. For He is *the Lord and giver of life*, we confess in the Creed. And if Jesus is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (as we heard last week), then if the Holy Spirit is the giver of life, He is the giver of Jesus. Jesus' good, Jesus' forgiveness, Jesus' life, Jesus' love, Jesus' sonship - all given to you. The Holy Spirit taking what is Jesus' and giving it to you.

And so you're really not orphans. With the Holy Spirit you are sons and daughters of God. Born from above. With a Father who's not going anywhere.

But we do, right? Go somewhere. Depart from our Father. That's what sin is. Not just doing something naughty. It's worse than that. For when we *live as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most* - to use the picture of the grave again - what we're doing is crawling back into the tomb again and making our home there! Satan making us believe that's a better place to be. That's what sin is, really. It is us choosing life apart from God; life on our own; life as I want it. . . . But there is no life apart from God. Because you know what life apart from God is called? *Death*. Just ask Adam and Eve.

But that's not what our Father in heaven wants. That's not why He sent His Son. That's not why He gave us His Spirit. He doesn't want a world full of orphans, living to die; but children, dying to live. Children of God, raised from the death of sin to life again. And Jesus promises that here, too. ***Because I live, you also will live***, He says. The tomb is not your future, life is. Love is.

And the Holy Spirit, the Helper, who raises us to that life, will also then help us live it. We'll begin to keep the commandments not because we have to, not because we're afraid we'll get caught, but because that's who we now are. And we'll begin to see them not as rules that take away our life or make it less than it could be, but as a description of what real life looks like. What real love looks like. Not the distorted and deadly picture our world gives us today - find your life here, find your life there. Bread crumbs leading us back into the grave. No, the Spirit of truth teaches us the truth. That we live. A life with Christ now, and a life with Christ forever.

And the love you need? That's from the Spirit, too. He's the divine channel, the connection, to all you need. That you be who you are. Not an orphan trying to find your way through this world, but a child of God, knowing whose you are and where you are going. Knowing that you have a home your Saviour and brother has gone to prepare for you. Knowing that He has given you His Spirit to keep you until that day of His return, when all is ready.

And to keep you when the world does not appreciate you living this life and love. Peter talked about that today - ***suffering for doing good***. It doesn't sound right, does it?

Suffering, being punished, for doing good. But those living in the grave and those living outside of it have different understandings of what good is. And when we live and act and speak in ways that the world thinks not good, which runs up against what the world values and holds sacred, there will be resistance and backlash. Maybe severe. It may cost you your life.

But Peter then points us to Christ. To give us confidence in the midst of that. To know that what they may do to you, they already did to Him. But they could not take His life. They could not hold Him down. He rose, and ***is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him***. And so it will be for you and all who are in Christ. He rose so that you rise with Him. He lives so that you live with Him. And you do, *even now*. For as many of you have heard me say before, your eternal life isn't just something far, far away in the future - it is the life you are living now. Because the life you are living now isn't going to end. Death is simply that moment when it will continue in a new way - when we will finally see what we now believe. ***Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me***, Jesus says. That's a promise. That we will see what we now believe.

I will not leave you as orphans, Jesus says. How could He? He who has your nail holes in His hands and feet. He who here gives you His own Body and Blood to eat and drink. He who has prepared a place for you in heaven.

He is sending you a Helper. How could He not? For He knows, better than we, how much we need Him. And so He continue to provide. Here He is for you. Here is His life for you, His forgiveness for you, His food for you. That you live.

And that's your answer, your defense (as Peter said), to all ***who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you***. Your answer, your hope, your confidence is that Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] And that because He is risen, so are you. To a new life. An eternal one. Not an orphan, but a child of God.

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.