

Not Orphaned

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: Easter 6: John 14:15-21

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

People are longing for connection and loneliness is an epidemic. Jesus tells us we are not orphaned, never alone. We are constantly connected to God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We have 24/7 connection to wisdom, strength, presence, comfort...all of Jesus' gifts.

God's presence be with us all, beloved of God. Amen.

Recently the Surgeon General Vivek Murthy came out with a report that loneliness in our country is an epidemic. Feeling separated from human connection, fulfilling relationships, or family far away leaves people with an isolation that not only has mental and emotional effects, but also physical side-effects. For years we've been connecting on social media apps like Facebook and twitter, but those simply cannot replace real human connection. Seniors are suffering. Youth and young adults are suffering. Single people who are divorced or widowed are feeling this pain.

I'm guessing you can think about members of your own immediate family, friends, colleagues and think of at least one person who you know is feeling lonely. Perhaps it is yourself. Into our world and existence, Jesus speaks a profound truth and promise. "I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you."

When Jesus proclaims this promise to the disciples, "I will not leave you orphaned," this is before His death. He is getting them ready for all that is to come. "In just a little while, the world will no longer see me, but you're going to

see me because I am alive and you're about to come alive. At that moment you will know absolutely that I'm in my Father and you're in me, and I'm in you." (*The Message*. Eugene Peterson. Nav Press. 1995. Colorado Springs, CO. Pg 261.)

Can we hear the love in these promises? Jesus promises that the disciples will continue to know Jesus and see Jesus and be in Jesus' presence even after He is long gone. They are frightened and afraid of the future. Jesus assures them of His constancy to be with them always.

Sometimes we say, "Oh if Jesus were here today, it would be so much easier. We could ask Him all our questions." The truth is, it is easier for us than it was for the disciples. Most of the time they didn't know what to think of their Lord. They were confused and befuddled even though they knew at some level the truth about Jesus.

For us, we have a 24/7 connection to God through the Holy Spirit. We don't share in the disciples' confusion because we know the end of the story. Today, we have access to Jesus' wisdom, strength, comfort and presence. Indeed, we are not alone. We are not orphaned by God. God through the Holy Spirit is sitting on the couch with us. Out taking a walk with us. God is listening to our prayers, thoughts, fears and joys. This Advocate, this comforter, and helper God is with us always.

There are certainly events in our lives which might threaten our trust in Jesus' promise. A radio announcer this week was anticipating his own grief at the absence of his mother on Mother's Day, even as he celebrated who she was as a mom. A friend moves away to take a new job. A teenager feels betrayed when a friend, 'unfriends' them or worse, slanders, them on social media. Spouses' work takes them long distances from home. Those imprisoned have family members who've given up on them. Elders sit alone in nursing home halls. We can feel orphaned when the pain of loneliness pushes against our souls.

As our Synod holds its Assembly in El Paso, Texas, this coming week, we will hear stories of men, women and youth crossing the border. We all have heard the stories of children crossing without their parents. Orphaned and entering an unknown land, I can't imagine how lonely they feel. *All of God's children whether we are housed or unhoused, married or single, rich or poor, receive this incredible promise of Jesus. "You are not abandoned!"*

We are not abandoned! We are never alone! That means we have a place. We know a home. As a community and as individuals, Jesus' promise is true! God is

with us. First the incarnate Jesus came to earth with skin on. Now, God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit to be our connection every minute of the day. Isn't that incredible? The creator of the universe is with us always!

When we allow this glorious truth to sink deep into our souls, we don't have to feel alone. The ache of isolation dissipates. God does grant us the peace that passes understanding which comes with God's constant presence no matter what the day brings.

If we are struggling with isolation, today, allow the smile of another to sink inside. See in them, the presence of God who created them. Pause to really taste the wine and the bread of our Lord's Supper. Jesus who is contained in, with and under those elements is with us. In us. Listen to the hymns and songs. Hear God singing a love-song over you. Pass the peace and pause to look into the eyes of another human being...another spiritual being on a human journey just like you.

As I was saying to the children in the children's sermon, Jesus asks us to keep the commandments as a way of loving God. Because the ten commandments have to do with loving God and loving neighbor; broken commandments actually break down relationships. Lying. Speaking ill of another. Coveting what someone else has.

In turn, as we keep God's commands, we build up relationships: our relationship with God and human connection. First of all, and foremost, we worship. We tell the truth. We seek to say positive things about someone else, whether they are present or not. We are content with what we have and grateful for what another has. We advocate for those less fortunate and work towards their health and wholeness.

As we act in these ways, as we keep God's commands, we actually might notice our own isolation and seclusion decreasing. Any mental health counselor will say that focusing only on ourselves isn't healthy. As you and I take this incredible message to people that need to hear it, our own joy increases.

We are not orphaned! We are not alone! We are constantly connected with an ever-loving God who comforts, directs and helps us on our way. Praise be to God and to God be the glory. Amen.