

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Easter 6A
May 17, 2020
John 14:15-21

Not an Orphan

18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18 ESV)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Being an orphan is to not have parents. Thus it sometimes means to not have a family, to not have anyone to guide us, care for us, or provide for us. It might mean to be alone, isolated from others. So we may feel like orphans whenever we suffer great loss. No matter how old we are, if our parents have died, we're orphans, and feel a great sense of loss. If our spouse has died, or abandoned or divorced us, we are as orphans. The pain and loneliness will often haunt us at times.

So on the night when Jesus was betrayed, as He sat at table with His disciples, He taught them what was going to happen in the next few hours. He encouraged them with promises that probably didn't make sense right away, but would later. And what Jesus says to the disciples, He says to you as well, "I will not leave you as orphans."

Now the disciples may have wondered what He meant by that. After all, He was still with them. Yet, before the night was through, they would see their Lord hauled away and finally nailed to a cross to die. The One who had called them to leave everything, even families, and follow Him would be taken from them. He would die and be buried. They would be as orphans.

But Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." Again, how those must have seemed empty words when those disciples saw Jesus on that cross, suffering, dying, and then laid in the tomb. And yet, those words were true, even beyond their comprehension.

For what's easy to miss is Jesus saying, "Because I live, you also will live." You see, from our vantage point, we can see what Jesus meant. "Because I live," Jesus said. Not just right now, not just for the next few hours, but in the future too, and forever. The eternal Son of God who created the world and had become flesh, lives. Even though He would die, He would rise from the dead. He had told them that at least three times, but it's still hard to grasp what this rising from the dead is. But as long as Jesus is alive, they were alive too. What joy was theirs!

But if we only see this as talking about Jesus' impending death, rest in the tomb, and resurrection, we sell Jesus short. For Jesus is also preparing them for His ascension, which the Church celebrates this Thursday. For now though, when the disciples would no longer see Jesus in the flesh, once again they would be like orphans – alone, afraid, unsure how they will survive.

But closely related to Jesus' promise, "I will not leave you as orphans," is His promise, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth." Another Helper. A Counselor. A Comforter. That's exactly what they would need. And that's exactly what they would get. When they faced doubts and fears, when the world and culture seemed set on their destruction, rejecting the message they would be sent to proclaim, they would need that Paraclete to strengthen them and encourage them. They would need the Spirit to bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them. They would need the Spirit to remind them that Jesus was not gone, but only hidden from their sight. Because Jesus lives, they will live too.

And the promise is still good. It's still as brimming with comfort as it ever was! For what Jesus said to those disciples, He says to you as well. "I will not leave you as orphans." Though you may at times feel abandoned and all alone, Jesus is still with you. Because He lives, you will live too. The One who died for you and rose from the dead for you and lives and reigns to all eternity for you still provides everything you need for this life and for the world to come. He gives you His Spirit who unites you to Himself and to the Father in Baptism. And while your Baptism was done once, it has an ongoing effect that will last through eternity. The Spirit brought you to faith through the hearing of the Word and Baptism and keeps you in that one true faith through the Gospel of Christ.

And he does all this not because you're worthy, not because you love Jesus so much, not because you keep the commandments so well, but only out of His great love, mercy, and grace toward you. Rather, you do love Jesus and you do keep His Word because the Spirit He sends to you works that all in you. You see, you are not an orphan because you have been adopted into God's family. God the Father is your Father, now and forever. His Son, your Lord Jesus, is your Brother and Savior, now and forever. His Spirit dwells in you now and forever so that you will live.

And living in Christ, loving Him, you keep His Word. Not in the sense of obedience, but in the sense of holding on to it, loving it, respecting it, guarding it as the treasured thing it is. It's letting it penetrate into your very being, experiencing it, regarding it as so precious that you would rather lose anything else than lose it. For His Word is spirit and life. His Word is Himself. So when you listen to it, think about it, ponder it, let it sink into the essence of your soul, it's a power that gives life, gives new birth, heals your wounds, and carries you through all difficulties. For that Word gives you Jesus Himself with all He has to give.

So with your life all wrapped up in Jesus' life, yes, His resurrected life, you will be blessed even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake. With your life secured with Jesus' life you can "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that

is in you.” (1 Peter 3:14-15). And while many will not listen and may even persecute you, rest in the promises of Christ that He will not leave you as an orphan and that He will send you the Holy Spirit, which He has and does. And that Spirit will keep you in and with Jesus.

So whether your earthly parents are still living or not, fear not. For you have an eternal Father and a family. You are not alone. You are not an orphan. Your Lord Jesus lives and you too will live. He is with you now and forever.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener