

"I Will Not Leave You Orphaned"

John 14:15-21

Coping with Covid-19 is getting to all of us. For many, it is causing emotional and even spiritual stress. If that is how it is stressing you, are you struggling with the idea that maybe God doesn't know about you? That God doesn't really understand your problems, or that even if he does, he probably is much too busy to care? Maybe you believe that God has time for some other folks, but you've been left off somewhere; you know that you're supposed to be a child of God, but you don't have any sense of that. You feel abandoned and alone when it comes to your relationship with God. If you've ever felt or thought that way, or if you're feeling that now, I hope you'll hear Jesus' words from our Gospel lesson this morning. Turn with me now and let's hear it together.

As we look into the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel According to John, we find Jesus speaking with his disciples. The mood is somber. The Cross and the Resurrection are coming, which means that he will be separated from them soon. He is trying to tell them what this all means, and why they are not to become discouraged. Yet, despite all Jesus' reassurances, the disciples become quiet and subdued. They fear that they are about to be abandoned.

In the opening lines of the chapter, Jesus speaks those wondrous, comforting words that many of us know by heart, "Let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. For in my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Despite these words, the gloom only deepens. Then Thomas speaks the other's minds, " Lord, we don't know the way...How can we know the way?" To this Jesus responds, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. "

Now Jesus goes on to tell them that once he leaves them, he will send the Holy Spirit, and his spirit will be with them and in them from then

on. He and the Father are about to become even more present with them, even more than Jesus himself is at that moment. Then Jesus speaks a most marvelous promise, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." I will not leave you orphaned. Think of that. God is our loving parent, and in Jesus God will not ever abandon us. He will never leave us orphaned. We will never be left, as in the words of that great spiritual, "...a motherless child, a long way from home."

Let's consider for a few moments this morning, what it means that God will never leave us orphaned. And let's begin with this meaning: We will always have God's presence. Look at verse 16, "and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate," (Other translations use words such as helper or comforter. The word here includes all those meanings) "to be with you forever." Further on in verse 17 he continues, "...You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." In this verse Jesus is making it very clear that through the Holy Spirit among us and in us, God will always be present with us in every moment of each and every day. When we ask Jesus into our lives, the Spirit comes into us, to live in us from then on. Our bodies have actually become a temple where the presence of God dwells at all times. Listen to I Corinthians 6:19&20. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?...therefore glorify God in your body." You see, it's not about whether we feel God's presence all the time or not. The reality is that God is with you and me even if feelings are not registering his presence. Don't base your trust on your feelings. Put your trust in Jesus' promises. He promises he will not leave you or me orphaned. You and I will always have God's presence.

This leads us to one more meaning of God never leaving us orphaned. You see, Jesus not only sends his Spirit to give us God's presence, Jesus also gives us the power to conquer life. Listen to verse nineteen, "After a little while the world will no longer see me; but you will see me; because I live, you also will live." How encouraging those words are, "Because I live, you also shall live." Because he is with us, we can do more than just cope; we can accomplish more than to just endure; we

can conquer. And that includes our current circumstance.

A parent who is there is wonderful. A parent who understands is even better. But best of all is the parent who prepares us to live life and gives us the tools to succeed. Just such parents gave their daughter the tools to succeed and to conquer. Though the story begins in 1942, its end results are much more recent. In 1942, you will remember, hysteria over Japanese involvement in World War II led to the relocation and internment of some 110,000 Japanese Americans to concentration camps. We did that! May we as a nation, never forget this dark lesson: that even good people, even ourselves, can do great evil to others when we allow fear to rule our hearts. Fear grips many hearts right now. We must be on guard to protect the vulnerable from the fearful. In one of these camps, Carole Doi, a first-generation Japanese American, was born.

Years later, Carole married a man who had also spent time in the camps. When she delivered their baby daughter, they noticed that the child's feet turned inward, the toes facing each other. Carole and Jim were determined to do whatever it would take to help their daughter walk normally. For four years they provided their daughter with corrective shoes and therapy. Their daughter was walking normally by age six, but Carole wasn't satisfied that this was all that was needed. "I wanted her to do something in which she would use her legs," she says. The girl chose ice skating. The girl was a natural on the ice. Before long, the youngster was bugging her parents for more rink time. She'd refuse to leave the ice until she would get each particular move right. Soon, Carole was rising at 4 a.m. to get her daughter to the rink. Finally, after 15 years of lessons, encouragement, and sacrifices, young Kristi Yamaguchi represented this country in the Olympics.

As the U.S. flag was hoisted during the medals ceremony, Carole and Jim Yamaguchi watched Kristi receive the gold medal. Kristi Yamaguchi stood on that victory platform because of a mother and father who stood with her in life and gave her the tools to conquer.

God is like that mother, and like that father, helping their daughter walk life with straight feet. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you," says Jesus, "...because I live, you also shall live."

There it is! There is a promise of God that does not fail. No matter what you may be feeling or thinking to the contrary in these times, you have the presence of God within you through the gift of God's Spirit. That is the presence that will never leave you nor forsake you. That is the presence that will lead you to conquer.

We honored our mothers last Sunday. And we will honor our fathers a few Sundays from today. How great to have such days! But even more than these two Sundays, we honor God, our Heavenly parent, every Sunday, and every day, who is the foremost loving parent; the one who is ever present, ever understanding, and ever giving us the strength to overcome. Because Christ lives, you and I shall live! We will never be orphaned!