

Pastor Joe Polzin  
 John 14:15-21  
 “Not as Orphans”  
 Year A – Sixth Sunday of Easter  
 May 17, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

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

We’ve all gotten used to hearing about the dangers and impact of COVID-19 and how it has changed how we as a society operate. We’re staying at home now and maintaining social distance to help combat the spread of the disease, which is important, of course. However, this could end up having some other significant side effects, including what experts predict will be a large increase in those who feel lonely and even socially isolated.

Even before the pandemic, I think it’s fair to say, that with the increase in digital technology, there has been a correlated decrease in face-to-face social interactions. And among people ages 50 to 80, which is a large portion of our congregation, more than one in four said they felt isolated. And that was before coronavirus and social distancing. Can you imagine how many more feel that way now, and will for some time? Social isolation and loneliness have been linked to numerous physical and mental health problems, contributing to the effects of things like heart disease, anxiety, and depression.<sup>1</sup>

And that’s not even to mention the effects this has on a person’s faith, which of course is not something separate from our overall health and well-being, but is part of it. And that’s why we need to be alert and see that, in terms of the devil’s tactics and strategies, he is reveling in what we’re going through right now. He wants to separate and wear down Christ’s Church, and how better to do that than to isolate Christians, even preventing them from going to Church, and get them on their own where they are more susceptible to his attacks?

Now, I’m not claiming that the devil is the one who caused this whole situation. Who’s to say how this fallen world, and our own sin, and the devil himself all come together to cause current events? But there’s no doubt he is active in trying to drag Christians down and convince them they are all alone.

And you know the phrase, “divide and conquer”? It refers to an army’s strategy of finding a way to divide the opposing army, so that they’re more easily conquered than if they kept their forces together. And it’s certain that the devil believes the more Christians he can get feeling isolated, alone, and abandoned, the more likely he thinks he can conquer us. Or to use Jesus’ word from our Gospel Reading, the devil wants us to believe we are “orphans.” And I’m sure it’s tempting, especially in this present time, to begin to wonder if we indeed are.

Now, generally speaking, our sinful world actually glorifies the life of a spiritual orphan. Because orphans have no Father, therefore there’s no authority over them. Orphans get to roam the street, following no schedule, indulging every passion, bending to no will but their own. An orphan’s goal is autonomy. They live the way they want to live. They recognize no one’s claim upon them, refusing all offers of adoption. This is the way a world who wants nothing to do with God loves to live. And the devil makes living like a spiritual orphan seem like the most fulfilling thing ever. “Be your own person,” society says. “Do what you want to do. Do what feels good.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2020/how-covid-19-pandemic-could-increase-social-isolation-and-how-providers-and-policy-makers>

And it all seems so fulfilling... that is, until it isn't. Because eventually, for everyone, the crushing weight of being alone and family-less will catch up to them, whether it's on the day they're standing before the Almighty Father, when all claims of self-autonomy go right out the window, or just as likely, it will be on a day even before then, sometime during this life. A day when the rubber meets the road, a day of crisis in someone's life, when they realize that what they could really use right now is a family, and a parent, a heavenly Father who calls them his own. And this brings us back to our feelings of isolation, and loneliness, and being an orphan. And what we find, and what many who are living through this isolating pandemic know all-too-well, is that being an orphan is not fun, or fulfilling at all. It's crushing and full of despair.

This is what Jesus is addressing in our Gospel Reading. And this is still part of Jesus' last conversation with his disciples in John's Gospel before he goes to the cross. You'll remember that Jesus had spent a lot of time preparing his disciples for this moment. He had told them exactly what would be happening, including his being handed over to sinful men, his suffering, his crucifixion, and his death. He had said all this was going to be necessary for him to accomplish his mission of salvation for the sake of the entire world, the reason why the Son of God had come to this world as a human being in the first place.

But it didn't sink in for them. At least, not yet. The disciples weren't truly prepared because their ears could not hear. And so, when the Shepherd was struck down, the sheep were scattered, just as Jesus had said. When they saw Jesus hanging lifeless on the cross, and when they had heard that his body had been laid in a tomb, they felt alone. They felt abandoned. They felt like orphans.

And that's why Jesus had said what he said in John 14: "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." Jesus promised he was going to come back. And three days later, he did, when he rose again and he was truly alive. The resurrection of Jesus validated everything he had said, and the disciples finally remembered his words and could see that what he had said was true.

And though Jesus would be ascending to the right hand of God forty days later, so that he could take his rightful place ruling over all things as Lord and King, Jesus again was making it clear that his disciples still would not be left alone. Jesus said, "[My Father] will give you another Helper," and the word in Greek is Paraclete, the Advocate, the Counselor, the Comforter, the Helper, the Person of Pentecost... the Holy Spirit, and he "will be with you forever... You know him," Jesus said, "for he dwells with you and will be in you" (14:16-17).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are not left as an orphan. You have been born of "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), you have been baptized. And when those waters poured over your head, your Heavenly Father sent you his Holy Spirit, who from that moment on, dwelled in you, and began an incredible work within you. The Father adopted you, forgave all your sin, and now calls you his own. He looks down upon you and see his beloved child, whom he loves, and promises to be with you every single day of your life, into eternity. The life that his Son won for you by his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection has now been given as gift to you. Nothing and no one in this world can ever take that away from you.

Jesus' words to his disciples are also meant to be heard by you today. Jesus says to you, "I will not leave you as an orphan; 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." Jesus not only burst open his grave on Easter morning, but he promises to come back for you on the day he returns and burst open your grave. And you will live, because Jesus lives.

What's more, you will see on that day all the evil, all the sin, all the attempts by the devil to separate us, and isolate us, and to make us feel alone like we're orphans, all that will be gone forever. And the only thing that you'll know is the eternal love of the family of God, and the eternal love of your heavenly Father, who has made you his son or daughter through his Son, Jesus Christ.

And knowing that this promise is yours, and knowing that Jesus is always with you and his Holy Spirit is always in you, you know you will be *never* be alone. You will never be an orphan. And this enables you to share that good news with a world that all but assumes and accepts that's how life is—that you're born alone and you'll die alone. But Christians can tell them that God has a different plan for us, a plan where God and people dwell together forever.

So, when you pick up the phone, and talk to your brother or sister in Christ, encourage each other with that, especially with what we're going through right now, because that's what we need to be reminded of, over and over again. And when you're telling someone about the love of Jesus, remind them *they're* not alone either. Christ, who is with you, and the Spirit, who dwells in you, will use you to tell others that we are left not as orphans. We have been made the children of God, and we will dwell with our God forever.

Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!* In his name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our risen Lord. **Amen.**