

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2017 - Easter 6  
Year A  
Acts 17: 22-31  
Psalm 66:7-19  
1 Peter 3:8-22  
John 14:15-21

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

“I will not leave you orphaned.” At some point we all want or even need to hear these words. They speak directly to some of our greatest fears and challenges; abandonment and isolation, loneliness, vulnerability. They remind us that we are not destined to walk this earth without an identity or direction. We do not stand alone.

To be sure there are seasons of life, moments, when the transitions, changes, and tragedies can leave us feeling as orphans. Whether spoken or unspoken the questions begin. What will I do now? Where do I go? What happens next? Who will love, nurture, and guide me? Who stands on my side? What will become of me? Those are the orphan’s questions. Those are the questions I imagine running through the heads and hearts of the disciples into gospel.

It is the last supper. Disciples have been fed, feet have been washed, the betrayer has left. It is night, dark, and Jesus announces he is leaving. The one for whom they left everything now says he is leaving. “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” “Show us the Father.” More orphan questions.

I am sure that you can point to situations in your lives when you have felt the same, and asked the same questions. “What will I do? What will happen to me?” The feeling of being an orphan is real. Yes, anyone who has ever loved and lost - a spouse, a child, a friend, security, hope - knows the orphan’s questions.

We fear becoming orphaned. That fear points to the deeper reality that by ourselves we are not enough. It is not, however, because we are deficient. It is rather because we were never intended or created to be self-sufficient. We were never intended to stand alone as individuals. We were created to love and be loved, to live in relationship as persons giving themselves to each other, to dwell, abide, and remain within each other even as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father; the antithesis of being orphaned.

“I will not leave you orphaned.” That is the promise. Regardless of the circumstances of our lives, storms, death, separation, we have never been and will never be orphaned by God. How strange that must have sounded to the disciples. In the same conversation Jesus tells them that he is leaving and coming. Leaving and coming sure sound like opposites. If we are not careful we will get struck trying to reconcile or figure this out. It is not, however, something to figure out. It is rather a means to see and live in a different way.

Leaving and coming. Presence and Absence. These must be held in tension, not as mutually exclusive. That is what Jesus has set before us in today’s gospel. That tension confronts us with the question of whether Jesus, for us, is a past memory or a present reality, a sentimental story that makes us feel good or a living experience that challenges, guides, and nurtures our life.

According to Jesus the answer to that question is determined by love that is revealed and fulfilled in keeping his commandments. The commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Whose feet do we wash and whose feet to ignore? What are the boundaries of love?

Do we keep the commandments? Is our love growing, expanding, transformative of ourselves and the world? If so Jesus is probably for us a present reality and we know the fulfillment of his promise that we are not left orphaned. If, however, we are not loving so much. If we remain self-enclosed and isolated we relegate ourselves and each other to the orphanages of this world. Jesus' promise is still real and he remains faithful we simply have not claimed it for ourselves.

Keeping the commandments is our access to Jesus' promise that we will not be left orphaned. Keeping the commandments does not make Jesus present to us. It makes us present to the already ongoing reality of Jesus' presence. The commandments do not earn us Jesus' love they reveal our love for him, a love that originates in his abiding love and presence within us.

Every time we expand the boundaries of our love we push back the orphanages of this world creating space within us where the Father and Jesus make their home.

"I will not leave you orphaned." Over and over, day after day, regardless of what is happening in our lives that is Jesus' promise. We have not been abandoned. Do not abandon yourselves or others to the feelings of abandonment that are so much a part of this world. Love with all that you are and that you have even as the Father and Jesus love us with all that they are and that they have.

In the name of God, Amen.