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## John 14:15-21

### CHRIST DOES NOT LEAVE US AS ORPHANS

Every Sunday he sat on the wooden steps of the front porch of the orphanage, just a boy, dressed in his best clothes. Usually, he'd stay out there until the director would make him come back in for supper. He was waiting for his mother to come see him. Initially, she'd come by every Sunday and take him somewhere. Then once in a while there'd be a Sunday when she didn't show. Eventually, she stopped coming at all. His name was Lester Kelly. His mother had turned him over to the orphanage as she felt she could not afford to keep him. I knew Lester as a hulking mountain of an 80-year-old man, with hands the size of baseball mitts, half his face covered in a white, Moses beard. Here it was 7 decades later and Lester wept as he told me his story. And though he had successfully married and raised a family of his own, he remarked that in a way it would have been better for him if he had never known his mother at all.

Jesus said, *I will not leave you as orphans.*

Have we ever felt more isolated what with the self quarantining and the social distancing? Even as you walk down the sidewalk folks might say hello but they keep their distance. Even if the official constraints are relaxed in Wisconsin, it's hard to say how socially comfortable people will be right away.

Perhaps it's at a time like this that we perceive more keenly than ever Jesus' visible absence. When we're surrounded by people we may not think of it much. Next Sunday we'll be observing the fact that He ascended into heaven. Jesus ascended to His Father, to His glory, to the ranks of mighty angels, to the adoration of countless believers who've transitioned there already. But here we are. And what has Christ left with us? He has left us with a book. With a Book, and a Sacrament of water and a Sacrament of bread and wine. It would seem He has left us with these in the midst of enemies: the unbelieving world, satan and all demons. It would seem He has left us to contend with our own sinful hearts. In a way we may feel a bit like Lester Kelly, as though Jesus has forgotten about us.

But Jesus promised: *I will not leave you as orphans.*

Jesus said this in the upper room to His disciples the night before His death. He was preparing them for His departure.

Jesus knows the human need for closeness. He took children in His arms, touched the leper with His hands, took the deaf-mute aside one-on-one, huddled in a boat with the Twelve. Though He would ascend visibly into heaven He had no intention of leaving us alone. Here in John 14 Jesus explains how He will fulfill His promise not to leave us as orphans by making two more promises.

First, He promises to send His Spirit. Jesus said, *If you love me, you will hold on to my commands.* (In other words, this is the opposite of persisting in unrepentant sin. Jesus is talking to believers.) Jesus continues: *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see him or know him. You know him because he stays with you and will be in you.* The Holy Spirit has been in you and with you from Baptism. He gave birth to your faith in Jesus and sustains your faith in Jesus by God's Word. He is the Spirit of truth so that whenever you hear or read or remember God's truth the Holy Spirit is present with you and living in you because He is living in the Word.

To paraphrase Jesus as He is talking to His disciples: Up till now I have been visibly present with you. But here is help for you much better than my limited, temporary visible presence here on earth where I am only one place at a time. I will not leave you as orphans because after I ascend into heaven I will send you this Counselor who will never leave you wherever you are.

Virtually everyone sees a counselor or talks to a therapist at some point. That can be helpful. This Counselor, the Holy Spirit, is unique because through the truth of His Word He reveals to you the mind of God. He counsels you with Christ's sufferings and death on the cross so that you need not fear God is keeping away from you because of your sins. He counsels you not merely with advice, but with power to help you avoid temptation and to keep clinging to Christ for salvation. He counsels you with the Savior's comfort when you are suffering. He counsels you with life as He preserves you in the faith until the Last Day when He will raise your body from the grave.

No, Christ does not leave us as orphans. Though He has ascended into heaven He sends us His Spirit through Word and Sacrament. This is a gift that brings God close to us—a gift for which we could not sufficiently thank Him if we were given a thousand years to do it.

Yet, as if that were not enough, Jesus promises us even more. Jesus does not leave us as orphans because Jesus Himself has promised to come to us personally.

Listen again to what Jesus said: *I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.* As we trust in Jesus He lives in us. Where does He make this more evident to us than in the Lord's Supper? There, under the mask of bread and wine, Christ gives us Himself, body and blood. If you've ever wondered, where is Jesus when I need Him? There He is in the Sacrament, being received by you into yourself, into your very heart. Did you need help against temptation? Are you wracked with anxiety? Grieving a life change? Trapped in an impossible situation? Uncertain about how God is looking at you? When you receive the Sacrament—Take eat, this is my body, take and drink, this is my blood—you are receiving to yourself the Champion against all sin, against the devil and all demons, the One who has promised that He has overcome the world. You are receiving the assurance of His unlimited forgiveness and of God's goodwill. You are receiving the One who now rules all things from God's right hand. You are receiving the One who died but now lives again to give you everlasting life.

No, you and I will never need to sit on a front porch waiting and wondering if Jesus has left us behind. Jesus does not leave us as orphans. In Word and Sacrament, He sends us the Counselor, His Spirit. What's more Jesus Himself comes to us and lives in us. He does not leave us as orphans. Let us trust in Him. He will remain with us until He gathers and bring us to our heavenly home.