

SERMON

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Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, IL

Easter 6, A, May 10, 2026

Acts 17:16-31, 1 Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21

Jesus told the disciples He was going to leave them.

- Worse yet, He told them
- that He was about to be put to death at the hands of His enemies.

We know how painful farewells can be--

- how hard to hear the words that announce their reality.
- Leavings, partings-
- but especially any kind of permanent ones involving loved ones or friends-
- bring tears and a special kind of inner pain.

What a dark storm cloud of gloom

- must have descended upon the very souls of the disciples
- as Jesus spoke to them about His leaving.

He had

- **done** such wonderful things,
- and **said** such wonderful things
- during the short time He had been with them.

Jesus had completely transformed their **personal** lives!

- How would they manage without Him?

Then it was that Jesus said something very different.

- They wondered how they would get along without Him.
- He told them that they really would not have to do that unthinkable thing.

“I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.”

The Greek word is *orphanous* and means, literally, “without a father.”

- It was a word also commonly used to describe
- the condition of disciples when their teacher or spiritual leader died.

The English word “orphan” conjures up all sorts of images--

- little Orphan Annie,
- children in war-torn or disease-ravaged lands,
- vulnerability,
- unfulfilled basic needs.

One pastor described us all as living in an “orphan universe”--

- one that has been being swept clean of the presence of God
- by an unbelieving society.
- We might even compare such a feeling with that which comes
- with the loss of a beloved mother.

But what a different feeling develops

- when, as recently, a revival has begun to break out at places,
- especially among our younger generation.

When we feel the reality of such a restoration

- of belief in the presence of God for us,
- it IS like a dear parent is restored to the center of our lives.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

In the immediate context,

- that coming seems to refer to the Resurrection.

But there is more.

- Also because of the context,
- we think of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Over and over again, Jesus speaks of **that** coming

- in his final farewell conversations with his disciples....
- The Holy Spirit would bring all that Jesus had said
- to their remembrance
- as an invisible Helper now.

We Christians believe in the Holy Trinity--

- and that wherever one Person of the Holy Trinity is present,
- all three are present.

Jesus, in the days of his flesh,

- could be only in **one** place at one time.

But the Holy Spirit has universalized Jesus.

- Through the Holy Spirit,
- Jesus Christ can be with all persons all the time.

So from the pages of Holy Scripture we learn that the early Church was not

- just a community of MEMORY,
- gathering to tell sad tales of days PAST when Jesus was present.

Instead, it was a community of Jesus Christ's LIVING PRESENCE.

- As they gathered together day by day
- and broke bread in each other's homes,
- they celebrated and gave thanks that Christ was still with them.

“I am with you always,”

He promised.

“(The Spirit) will be **in you**... You (will be) in me, and **I in you**.
... They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and **reveal Myself** to them.”

Are any of us feeling orphaned spiritually?

- Have we been afraid to love Him-- really to love Him--
- fearing that He was gone for good?

Have we been ignoring His commandments--

- including the one to believe in Him,
- believe in Him not just with words,
- but with our hearts and lives?...

- LOVING Him with all that we are?

The feeling of being orphaned is often connected

- to our less-than-satisfactory answers to those questions....

We do not have to be orphaned,

- but we can choose to be.

There has never been a time

- when the Church has been without the presence of Jesus Christ.

The first Christians expected an immediate return of Christ in glory,

- as King of Kings, during their lifetimes.

And in a very real sense,

- Jesus **did** return already then as the Spirit descended upon them.

We look forward to a final day

- when every eye will see Him

- and recognize Jesus Christ as Lord of all--

- but that does not lessen the fact that **He is already here.**

Jesus Christ is found already now by the Holy Spirit's working

- in the often humble, weak-appearing gatherings of those who love him.

Jesus Christ is found already now

- where we find those things the which the world counts as nothing--

- where people gather around Word and Sacrament,

- where faith, and hope, and love live--
- those foremost signs of the Holy Spirit's presence,
- and the things which alone can create life abundant....

We are a society which loves the **spectacular**--

- special effects in every area possible--
- in movies, at concerts, even when we go bowling.

We need to be reminded again and again that

- when the One through whom the stars were made
- came to visit our planet,
- it was to a manger at little no-count Bethlehem,
- then growing up in a small town of peasants,
- and a carpenter's house,
- in a less than desirable area called Galilee,
- calling as his chief aids not wealthy royalty or intellectual giants,
- but common fishermen.

He did not

- dress in the vestments of a high priest,
- or minister in the great Temple or a palace,
- but walked the countryside
- and sailed in fishing boats.

He went

- to the bedside of the sick
- and the dying.
- and befriended social outcasts.

He died on a cross like a despised criminal,

- giving up everything this world values
- for the sake of the world which God so loved.

And then in his appearances **after** the Resurrection,

- where was he to be found?
- Comforting tearful Mary Magdalene out at her lonely, painful place,
- back in the locked Upper Room with his huddled, frightened disciples,
- walking that dusty road to Emmaus
- and breaking bread for hurting, grieving and confused disciples,
- broiling fish at a surprise cookout on the beach,
- and taking time to restore that disappointing failure of a disciple,
- downcast Simon Peter....

Where are WE looking for Him now?

As Jesus was leaving to ascend to the Father, He said,

“These are my WORDS that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”... Then He opened

their minds to understand the SCRIPTURES.

And...

- He took the bread and broke it
- and THEN THEY RECOGNIZED HIM AS THEIR
- VERY PRESENT, RISEN LORD....
- and THEN He disappeared from their sight.
- What was he teaching them?

Where are WE looking for Him now?

Again, in His intimate High Priestly prayer,

- to which we will listen in next Sunday,
- He says to the heavenly Father,

“I have given them the WORDS that You gave Me.”

Where are WE looking for Him now?

“Take and eat.... Take and drink.”

“Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the LEAST of these.... You have done it to Me.”

If we are feeling orphaned,

- could it be we have been looking for our Teacher in the wrong places?

Are we loving Him where He promises to be found,

- where He chooses to be among us--
- or have we blinded **ourselves** to his presence

- and excused ourselves from his commands?

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

It’s a promise to all who love Him--

- including especially the most unlikely of people.

- including those who have not been faithful,

- even to those who are despairing.

It’s a promise which the risen Lord Jesus is fully able to keep--

- and a promise which has been kept through the ages

- in amazing ways by the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit.

“I will not leave YOU orphaned; I AM coming.... to YOU.”

Nothing could do more for a believer’s soul

- than to receive that promise and trust it....

Will you let Him keep that promise TO YOU?

As you do, that peace of God which far surpasses human understanding--
will all its joy and confidence-- will keep your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

I am indebted for portions of this sermon’s content to a sermon by Dr. Donald B. Strobe entitled “No Longer Orphans.”