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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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With His Spirit, Never Alone

John 14:15-21

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¹⁵ “If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever —¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. ²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In His name, dear beloved children of God

What does it feel like to be abandoned?

The Greek word in verse 18 is ὀρφανός (orphanous). Jesus recognizes the potential for His disciples to be left orphans – alone and abandoned.

They recline in the upper room with their beloved Teacher and Master. They hang on his every word. These are Jesus’ last words to them; He speaks words of farewell to His disciples. And when these words are finished, they will head out into the darkness. They will go out to the garden of Gethsemane for prayer, and there He will be taken from them. There in that place of prayer, Jesus will be escorted away by a detachment of troops sent by the Jewish Council. Judas leads the way and leads away – their Lord taken to death.

It is a bit of a flashback in the church calendar. It has been weeks now since Easter and we have been with the disciples witnessing and proclaiming the resurrection of our Lord. Yet, now we go back. We enter into a memory to hear the Apostle John recount these words of farewell. Yet, it is no real farewell; rather it is a promise to return. We flashback to that upper room where the Lord assures His disciples that with His Spirit, they will never be alone.

In one way or another, we all might face that feeling – abandoned, orphans, alone, left to fend for yourself. Today, we consider three situations where a Christian might feel abandoned. One way we might feel abandoned is when our own sinfulness overwhelms us and we wonder if God can forgive us or could ever allow us into His presence again. Another way we might feel abandoned is when someone who is supposed to love us, does something to hurt us and we wonder if we can ever trust or be close to anyone again. And yet another way we might feel abandoned is when we lose a loved one and we are left feeling alone in grief.

This now becomes for us – a resurrected flash back; it takes us back to that upper room so that as we venture out with our Lord into the darkness, we have His word, His promises with us. There in that upper room, Jesus assures us He will come to us; to counsel and care for us. He will send His Spirit to us, and thereby remains with us always. “I will not abandon you as orphans. I will come to you.”

With His Spirit, we are never alone.

With His Spirit, Never Alone – in our own sinfulness

“A little while longer and the world will see Him no more.” He will die and the light of the world will be extinguished into the darkness sin. Jesus is escorted away by a detachment of palace guards and Roman officers. He is led away by one of His own; one of His own chosen leads the way. And who will speak up? Who will do something to stop the injustice? He was their teacher, their master, their friend – and what would they do to stop it? Nothing. As Matthew records, “then all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matthew 26:56). His own chosen now abandon Him as betrayal leads Him away to death.

One way we might feel alone is when our own sinfulness overwhelms us.

The more find ourselves falling into the same sort of sins and weaknesses, the more we feel separated. Here we are, God-given caretakers of this creation. We are members of churches; we are parents; we are husbands and wives; we are children; we are temples of God’s Spirit – but when times are tough, when temptation has its way with us; when those people we are called to love and serve don’t seem quite so worthy of our love or service – we leave things undone. There are times when its just doesn’t seem worth it all and we abandon our daily duties to God and our neighbor. It is as if we figure someone else will come along and do these things for us. Overwhelmed by our own

sinfulness, we feel quite alone. Its not that God has abandoned us; its that we have abandoned God.

Isaiah writes to Israel: "Your sins have separated you from your God." Sin does separate us from God and that is why ongoing sin makes us feel more and more like orphans; we begin to figure we've given up the right to be called His child and we don't deserve to be allowed into His presence again. Our sinfulness leaves us alone.

This is where God brings us a resurrected flashback. He takes us into back to that upper room to hear our Lord's promise and see His fulfillment. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."

The way Jesus comes to us and does not abandon us is by sending us the Helper. The Greek is "Paraclete" – which in English we would render something like "Counselor, Advocate, Comforter." The Spirit's work is to counsel you; to aid you by calling to mind all that Christ has said and done. His work is to counsel and comfort troubled sinners and to strengthen you to love Him and keep His commandments.

Part of His work is to reveal to us that, yes, we have often left those daily duties of love and service undone and yes, we do not deserve to be called God's child. But He also reveals the truth – the truth is: someone else has come along and done these things for us. The Spirit reveals Jesus – the one who enters into the darkness of our sins to undo what we have done and to do what we have left undone. He is the Paraclete who comes to comfort and counsel with the light of Christ's resurrection and forgiveness.

You are not alone; for God has not abandoned you. In the waters of baptism God has given you His Spirit and called you His child. In His Word of truth, His Spirit remains with you, counseling and comforting. It is His Spirit who moves us to love Jesus and to keep His commandments.

To "keep" means "to treasure." So our keeping of His commandments is an ongoing recognition of how precious every word of God is. It is a love for Christ and a response to His gift of salvation. Our love and keeping of His commandments is a product of our salvation, not a producer of salvation.

His commandments are not burdensome. Who among us does not treasure these precious words of life? The fact that we are here, hearing this word, keeping the third commandment, shows we do treasure His commands. Even when we fail to obey His will, we do not stop acknowledging that His will is good and we love it. We hate our sinfulness and we give thanks that God has not abandoned us. The work of the Spirit is

a work of repentance – crushing and killing our old man and bringing forth a new man who lives to love and loves to live according to God’s commandments. In this, we see what the world cannot see: our teacher, our master, our friend is still with us in the Spirit.

With His Spirit, we are never alone.

With His Spirit, Never Alone – when someone who is supposed to love us, does something to hurt us

His disciples might have felt alone for a time. They likely felt abandoned. All their hopes and confidence were in Him. They believed, but they did not yet understand what all must happen. So then, when Jesus died, they are indeed hurt, let down, wondering what it was all for, why God let it happen. It is like the Emmaus disciples said: “we were hoping He was going to redeem Israel.” He was supposed to be with them forever – so what is this injustice has God allowed to happen?

Another way we might feel abandoned is when someone who is supposed to love us, does something to hurt us. Often those who are able to inflict the most pain are those nearest to us; it happens when those upon whom we are supposed be able to rely, are unreliable – they hurt us; they let us down. Such experiences can lead a Christian to feel abandoned, orphaned, and even to think God was behind it all.

You could take, for example, any number of stories about broken homes and broken marriages. A child naturally relies on his parents for everything. God has designed it to work this way. But what happens when one or both of those parents prove unreliable?

Its a sad story – but one that is all too familiar: a girl who is abused by her father at a young age. She is grown up now. He’s gone. But the memory is not. She can never be the same. It’s a struggle to sustain any sort of meaningful relationship. She figures she’s not good enough for marriage now.

He was supposed to love her, but instead he hurt her. She was supposed to be able to rely on him, go to him in every trouble, count on him to always be there for her – but she could never trust him. All she ever felt was alone, abandoned. Has God abandoned her?

The disciples too wondered if they were alone. It seemed their Lord was taken from them at the hands of sinful men. We witness these acts of evil all around and even in our own lives and where is Jesus?

19 "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also."

In such times when we feel abandoned, and wonder if God has left us, we need a resurrected flashback. The world can see Him no more. The many evils that lurk in this fallen world testify to the death and curse that binds us. In this world we will never see God – it is true. He is hidden from the world. When Christ dies, the world sees Him no more.

But we see what the world does not see. We see the promise; we see the hope; we see a life beyond death. In the midst of the darkness, in the midst of the suffering Jesus faced, there was hope. There was life beyond death and His resurrection would prove the answer to their questions. It was hidden in a promise.

God sends us His Spirit – “the Comforter, the Helper” – so that we see what the world cannot. Jesus is risen. Because He lives, we too will live. This means the restoration of all that has been broken. This means comfort for those who have been hurt. This means there is life for those who feel as though they’re dead.

This means that girl who feels so alone is never alone. God has not abandoned her. In His Spirit He is with her as He is with you. In the Word and Sacrament He remains with you. While He doesn’t answer every question and prove why He didn’t deliver us from being hurt sooner – what He does is to remain with us through out those times of pain and suffering. Jesus sends us His Spirit and gives us His commandment: you believe in God, believe also in Me.

The Spirit is the One who restores trust and love for God; who gives us patience to wait – to wait for the final resurrection; we know Jesus will return and He will vindicate all that all that has gone wrong; He will comfort all who suffer; He will wipe away every tear; so that the only thing that will remain to be seen is Jesus and even the world will then see His total victory over sin and every evil.

With His Spirit, we are never alone.

With His Spirit, Never Alone – when we lose a loved one

Those disciples will soon find themselves feeling alone. He dies and they are alone, left to fend for themselves. They have lost a loved one – their Lord. He left that upper room and ventured into the darkness. Would they ever see Him again?

Yet another way in which we might feel abandoned is when we lose someone we love in death. Death robs us of something and someone and can leave us feeling quite alone.

Any spouse that has lost a husband or wife knows this feeling. Any parent that has lost a child knows this feeling. It leaves a void and makes us feel like orphans. We're abandoned and alone.

Death is the enemy and it is described in 1 Corinthians 15 as the last enemy which will be destroyed at the return of our Lord. But for us who live in a world where this enemy still rules over physical life – we face this tribulation.

But why did He go to death? Why did Jesus venture into the darkness? These words are not really a farewell of our Lord – they are a glimpse of the last day. When He comes to us in His Spirit, He brings with Him all that He has accomplished and all that will be accomplished in the last day. This means that His resurrection comes to us in this promise.

19 "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.

He lives and He lives here in our midst. As we gather to receive His Word and to call upon our baptism we see Him, glorified. Where the Church is gathered around His Word, there is Christ in the Spirit so that the words I speak are the words He speaks. All who die believing in Him are with Him and are with Him wherever His Church gathers. Here His Spirit joins us to the assembly of heaven and we glorify and praise God in the hope of our resurrection.

Death robs us; but God gives back to us. As we read in the verse of the day: "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He fills that void and assures us that on the last day we too will live together with all who love Him and keep His commandments.

21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.

As we wait for that last day, we are never alone. For in His Spirit we have the love of Christ and His commandments are a joy for us in the new man. These commandments to love one another and to be faithful in God's ways are dear to us as we find purpose

even after the loss of a loved one. We find ourselves instruments of His Spirit – God-given caregivers of His creation.

In those commandments we have a caregiver's call. And in that call we find the Spirit living and active, sustaining us in God's love which gives us endurance and keeps us faithful unto the end.

It is a resurrected flash back – but it is also a fast forward: For His Spirit brings us something eternal. You are never alone. When your sins seem to overwhelm you, His Spirit brings overwhelming forgiveness. When the sins of those who are supposed to love us, hurt us, His Spirit loves us, undoing what has been done, and redoing us in trust and love for God's commandments. And when the death of a loved one leaves us feeling alone, His Spirit remains with us, giving us hope in that last day, when all who love and treasure God's commands will be raised up bodily and glorified to sing the praise of His new creation forever. Because He lives, we too will live.

With His Spirit, you are never alone.

Amen.