

We are not alone. Jesus does not orphan us.

I am grateful for this text and the gospel of John this week. What better word to hear than Jesus' word to his follower, "I will not leave you orphaned." Today we are living in a time of uncertainty with a virus that has upended every aspect of life on the planet. You may have heard that the coronavirus is so sticky you need to scrub your hands like a surgeon in order to wash it off. But think of this, God is stickier than the coronavirus. You may have heard that the virus spreads without our awareness, sometimes before signs of disease are visible. But think of this, Jesus promises divine presence through the Holy Spirit, also not visible, but with a force for life rather than death. How good it is to hear Jesus say that he will not leave us alone. More than that, Jesus says he will be present with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit as we live each day.

If you turn to the first words of the gospel of John you get a sense that a new world has opened up from the miracle of words and the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word." The text for this morning in John chapter 14 occurs in the last days of Jesus' life. Yet we hear Jesus summoning a new world into being. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

Within the 24 hours which follows this teaching, Jesus will have been tried, unjustly convicted, tortured, and executed as an enemy of the state. Jesus' followers will suddenly be living in a time of uncertainty and facing decisions. Who will they be, once Jesus is gone? Will they go towards polarity in their interactions, emphasizing vengeance, victims, and victors as a way of life? In this world you look out for yourself only. Or will they instead live in the world Jesus is creating where you love and consider the needs of others? Will you look at others as worthy of having what you daily are blessed to have?

In these Sundays after Easter we have been reading accounts of Jesus' followers coming to terms with the reality of a new world. The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus is a decisive moment. God raising Jesus from the dead altered the world. The followers of Jesus experienced swift change. Post-resurrection assurances from the risen Christ were needed to calm the anxieties and remind the followers of their training in God's ways. One of those lessons was that Jesus would not leave them alone.

It was 1989 and I was moving towards graduation from seminary and my first call. I remember observing and listening as one of my seminary classmates was using a personal computer for the purpose of word processing. Jim was talking about how he composed by writing down thoughts and then copying and pasting or deleting and rearranging sentences. Several of us who had been used to taking all our class notes by hand and writing out our term papers by hand and typewriting assigned papers thought, "I like how I do things, I really assimilate that information I write out by hand. I like composing my thoughts by hand before I begin typing (on a typewriter). I don't know if I want to try something new."

I headed out to parish ministry that summer in far west central Minnesota. I was responsible for creating the bulletin with announcements using a typewriter and copy machine. The parish did not have a monthly newsletter or any office staff. I listened as others were becoming computer literate but I stayed behind in technology.

Today I am grateful that in my second call a man named John Thor was there to encourage me to begin using computers. He supplied equipment as he updated his own so that we had use of a computer in the church office. I adapted by becoming curious about technology and trying new things. It was pretty obvious in the 1990's that the world was moving on to new forms of communication using the internet.

It was not necessarily easy to adopt a new way of word processing, sending messages, and accessing information. But I was not alone in that process, either. I had plenty of colleagues in ministry who were also learning and adapting right alongside me.

Today we are suddenly live streaming worship out of need but looking to how this can become a regular aspect of being the church. We will return to in-person worship at some time but what we have learned about broadcasting worship live will continue as part of how we move forward. We are not alone in thinking this way and figuring out how to do it. We could use more technical expertise and equipment, but we are coming to understand the world has shifted again, and some of the lessons we learn today will become part of what we do in the future.

It has not been easy to adapt. We are in this together. From this end where we create worship, we have had to overcome personal fears and changing circumstances. From your end as the viewer, you may have experienced challenges due to the age or sophistication of your equipment. Just the other day an expert in electronics and communication was telling me of all the aspects which can affect the transmission of this video and audio. There are things you can do that will enhance the transmission you receive, there are some things the church can do to create a better video and audio, and there are other things we have no control over which affect the broadcast. To adapt means not getting caught up in fear or confusion or frustration but instead persevering toward the goal of doing as much as you can.

In our text the main question is, will followers of Jesus be caught up in the fear and confusion swirling around them or will they root themselves in God's love, which casts out fear? The letter of First John says "God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and matures in us, so that we're free of worry...our standing in the world is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear."

Jesus generously gives the commandment to love, the promise that those who follow the command will have the support of God the Father, and the grace of his own presence. Seeing that his followers may feel abandoned, vulnerable and orphaned by God, Jesus promises another Advocate who will be with them after he is gone. This one, the Advocate, will stand alongside the disciples, walk with them, assist them when they plan, and work with them as they reach out with love.

What a gracious God we have. The gifts, promises and presence of the divine are still active today. This is a time when we need it more than ever. We are living in a liminal space. We hear that we are beginning to live with new norms for society. In the midst of great and swift change life feels uncertain. We feel uncomfortable as we are asked to adhere to new disciplines but this is a common feeling when you do something new. We need God and the gift of faith to keep us grounded in these days.

Last fall as St. John's began to ask for people to gather supplies for Christmas totes, we were reminded that our Christian faith is shown through our acts of love. I remember the words of our Caring Ministry, "They will know we are Christians by our love." We are called again to love today.

We are called to love in the midst of an uncertain world. We are called to acts of love which are new disciplines in life. But the overall premise is the same. We learn love from the one who humbled himself and became a servant of all. A couple of weeks ago I became sick with some kind of virus. I went and got tested for the coronavirus, (the results were negative), because I began to think, "What if I had it and now put my family and the staff at risk?" Thank goodness the test was negative.

We learn love from the one who humbled himself and became a servant of all. We learn love by knowing whose we are, God's, and by following in Jesus' way, a humble servant type of love. And when it is uncomfortable, or doesn't feel natural, we lean on the presence of the Holy Spirit, knowing that God never leaves us alone.