

Easter 6, 2008  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
John 14. 18

The Gospel lesson for today, takes places on a lonely Thursday night, shortly before Jesus enters the garden of Gethsemane. It has become clear to one and all, that Jesus is about to be betrayed, and arrested; and once arrested, it is plain, that there is indeed a cross out there waiting for Him. And to the disciples, who are scared and confused, Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. Among other things, in verse 18, He says “I will not leave you, as orphans.”

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we admit, everything important that happens in this world is simply beyond our power to control. Our bodies age, our loved ones come and go. Our regrets keep adding up, our chances to make things right are slipping away; we need your help. Come to us in our weakness, and give us the kind of hope that can only come from knowing you as Savior and Lord; Jesus in your name we pray, AMEN.

Not very many children in our midst today, will know what it’s like to grow up as an orphan; and for that we can give thanks to God. Most children we know have parents, and grandparents too, and are loved and cared for the way children are supposed to be loved and cared for. Again, thanks be to God—for we know that’s not always been the case. Just a generation or two ago in this country, when medical care was much more sporadic and life was much more difficult, well orphanages were much more common.. Or elsewhere in this world, right now—medical care is *still* sporadic, life is *always* hard. War famine disease are daily realities, and many, many children are forced to grow up all alone, and in the long and sad history of this planet. How many millions of children have been left as orphans. It still does happen all the time today, and it’s honestly hard for me to imagine anything more heartbreaking.

For the disciples of Jesus, that Thursday night just outside the garden of Gethsemane, they probably didn’t have to do a whole lot of imagining. Given the reality of life then, 2000 years ago in Palestine, well odds are that several of the disciples probably had grown up as orphans; certainly when Jesus used the word in conversation with them, verse 18—nobody needed to have it explained. They knew what it meant, from personal experience; and even more, they perhaps understood how the word fit them at that precise moment. Like small children, scared and alone, these grown men these disciples looked to Jesus for everything. For three years they had followed

Him everywhere, hanging on His words and living in His shadow. They'd trusted Jesus, they'd hoped in Jesus, they'd dared to relax and be happy because of Jesus. Now the other shoe was about to drop. Jesus was going to be arrested, and crucified, and they'd be alone again. And although they were grown men yeah, they were nervous, and distressed, and very afraid.

Don't be, Jesus said. Don't be nervous, don't be afraid, and don't give up on hope. Hey, He said. Don't give up on Me. I will not leave you as orphans. The world may not see Me much longer, but you will, and I will be with you. I will not let you down.

And, of course, you know how the story proceeds from here. Jesus was in fact arrested, and condemned. Crucified dead and buried, for us, for the forgiveness of our sins. The world didn't see Him any longer—out of sight out of mind, no surprise there—but to those who believed, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared, alive and victorious. And among those who believe, He is still here. He has not left us, we are not orphaned in this world—we have a living hope, because of our living Lord and Savior; the one who won't let us down.

Now it always seems to me, that whatever Jesus says to the disciples in the Gospel, He is in a sense also saying to us. "I will not leave you as orphans," He promises—good. I'm glad—but what exactly does that imply about us? What does it say, that to God, those of us gathered here right now really do look as frightened and helpless as did those disciples? As frightened and helpless, as a parentless child? That may seem a bit much but, it's what He said, it's what He called us, is He right? Well, yeah, if we're honest. Is there anyone who doesn't know what it's like, to be weak and alone and afraid. Is there anyone immune to this, is there anyone who's never been through it? Young people, about to graduate and head off to college; parents, about to let them. It's a wonderful thing, but it's not a sense of wonder that keeps me awake at three in the morning, I can tell you that. Husbands and wives, alive and well but not speaking to each other; children not orphaned but caught in the middle of it all. Losing your job, losing your income, in today's economy losing your home. Losing your health, losing mobility and independence. Losing loved ones through death—the hospital waiting rooms and the funeral visitations, we had

dared to relax and be happy and then all of a sudden the other shoe drops. And we are like small children again, hurt and afraid; and we know it.

Sin does this to us too. When time is beginning to run out, and it will, for all of us—but when time is beginning to run out it seems to me you suddenly become much more aware of mistakes, and regrets, and things you should have done different but can't now, and there are days my sin is just staring me in the face, and the consequences are such I can't deal with them anymore. Am I the only one? And if it's you too, do you maybe feel kind of helpless then? A little lonely, and maybe a little afraid? Sort of like an orphan, as Jesus would say.

But you're not. You're not orphaned, you're not left alone to fend for yourself, best as you can, with no hope for anything better. You are in the company of Jesus Christ. The one who died and rose again—well, He did that for you, you know. He died and rose again, and is here now in our midst, and He's there with you in your daily walk. There are moments in every life, enough to make the strongest adult feel as helpless as a parentless child, we are none of us as strong as we wish we were. But He is stronger than we can imagine. And He is with us now, and everyday, and one day soon we will be with Him. Not left as orphans, but held close and loved forever. May that day come quickly, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.