

6 Easter John 14:12-21 4/27/08 Galilee

I want you to try to **picture** Jesus and his disciples together in the Upper Room the **night before** he was to be crucified. For three years Jesus has been their companion. In him they have come to sense the **very presence** of God. And now he is about to be taken from them. Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for the grief they will face the next day. So to comfort them and to prepare them for his departure, he promises to send “a **Counselor**”, or as this morning's Gospel explains it, an **Advocate**, the **Holy Spirit** who will **help them** and **be with them forever**. This will be a friend like himself, but who will never be taken away. Jesus told his disciples, *“I will not leave you orphaned.”*

Perhaps some one here today thinks of himself/herself as **orphaned**, feeling **alone** and thinking that God **really doesn't care much about you any more**. Christians have known **loneliness, frustration, self-pity, fear** and **pain**. We've all known these realities at some time in our lives. But we also know the **power** and the **new life** brought by Christ's **love, joy** and **peace**. **Christ promises that he will not leave us as orphans. Christ through his spirit** goes with us always, which gives us **peace and hope**. Our lives are not just in our **hands but in his**. **Some bad things might happen to us**. We **could lose our job, our spouse, or our health**, but he still says the same thing – I will not leave you orphaned. You might be **devastated by a crisis, a death, or circumstance** so terrible that it might truly be hard to go on. Still, Jesus promises, *“I will not leave you orphaned.”* And Jesus asks so little of his disciples and us, simply *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

A key part of our Christian lives and obeying Christ's commands is **loving others**. We are to **live with care and concern for all** – especially those whom the **world has abandoned**. The same Spirit that comforts us with the good news of our ongoing relationship with God also empowers us in our **serving and reaching out** to others.

A few years ago I read a story in Newsweek about a college president who took a sabbatical year - and it was an unusual sabbatical. When clergy go on sabbaticals they usually include some study in their time away! ^{rest & relaxation} But this **distinguished scholar** and **successful administrator** decided to leave the academic world and sample a variety of hard work experiences. He went to work as a **farm hand**, getting up at 4:30, putting in 13 hard hours of work a day. He worked also as a **ditch digger** and said he rediscovered the **muscle strain and the agony** of an **unchanging routine**. He worked as a **dishwasher** but got fired after several days. And he **learned first hand** how **demoralizing** it can be to be **put out of work**, of what it felt like to **not** have a job. He even worked on a **garbage truck**, and experienced American class-consciousness in a fresh way.

At the end of his sabbatical year he returned to his college campus and took up the president's responsibilities again. He said he had rediscovered some important things about himself. He felt more in touch with a lot of people he wouldn't have the opportunity to sit next to in the library or bump in to in the refectory on campus. He said he felt ~~he had~~ a **deeper sense of empathy** for many ordinary folk. And he said it was truly a sharing sabbatical, sharing life with many **not so fortunate as he**.

That is surely a mark of the **Holy Spirit** that was in Jesus. No one has more fully identified with the **poor, the outcast, the weak, the lonely**, those who are **frightened**, those who feel **guilty**, and **those who are dying**.

And what did Jesus expect of his disciples, and us today? ‘If you **love me, you will keep my commandments.**’ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate, to be with you forever.’ That night in the Upper Room, as Jesus was to be taken from them, he consoled his disciples with the promise of another Advocate/Counselor, One who is called alongside to help. Jesus has set the example for us and he asks that we follow in his steps. A key part of Christian living and obeying Christ’s commands is to **love others**. To live with care and concern for all – especially whom the world has abandoned is all **of our responsibility, our ministry**. We do not have to do this alone. The Holy Spirit is with us. The Spirit continues to do for us what Jesus did for his disciples. *“I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you. Before long the world will not see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”*

Look with compassion and empathy into the faces around you. There you will find a gentle hint about **your advocate, your spirit**.

To love another person is to see the face of God. Amen