

“Never Alone”  
John 14:15-21  
May 14, 2023

A few years ago one of our local TV stations would do a special segment at the end of the news every Saturday or Sunday night about children, namely foster children, who were available for adoption. These were often heart wrenching stories as you would see boys who longed for a dad or brother to play ball with them and girls who hoped for a mom or sister to play dress up with them. The children would usually talk about their favorite hobbies, how they liked learning in school, and of their desire to be part of a family. While each child was unique, what they all had in common was their desire to be loved. And who could blame them. These children were growing up without any real stability, often moving from one foster home to the next, attending different schools, and feeling very lonely – like no one wanted them.

Loneliness is a very real feeling, and there’s nothing you can say to simply sweep it away. I think there is a deep hunger in all of us to have someone we know who understands us, who is an intimate part of our lives, and who will never leave us. We are created in such a way that we often need comfort from other people. As a pastor it is always very fulfilling to give a word of comfort to someone in need, but sometimes it is difficult to find the right words to say to those who are lonely.

For example, we have heard about local college students this year who have committed suicide. What do you say to the parents of those students, especially when the funerals have ended, the meals, cards, and encouraging notes on social media have stopped, and everyone has gone back to their busy normal lives? They are hurting and lonely, and now it is graduation weekend. Other students will walk across that stage to receive a diploma, but their child will not be there. Imagine them coming to you and wanting to know how they are going to cope with life knowing that their child is gone. Or how about the man whose mother died when he was 5,

whose father is a struggling alcoholic who refuses to get any help, and now his marriage of 10 years has ended with his wife leaving him for another man? It's Mother's Day, but he will not be celebrating in any way today. Instead, he's hurt, lonely, and depressed. What do you say to him when he asks you what he has to live for now?

Every time I am confronted with loneliness, I take great comfort in the fact that God never has and never will want us to believe that we are alone. Times when there is truly nothing I can say, I do know that I can direct the lonely to what God has spoken in His Word. Throughout the pages of Scripture God shows us that the problem of loneliness for His people is nothing new. The first human being, Adam, was lonely, and so God did something about it and made Eve. David fled from King Saul and probably would have been caught and killed, but God did something about it and sent Saul's son, Jonathan, to befriend David and to protect him. Many times in the New Testament people who were suffering from some terrible diseases were told they had to separate themselves from the community and live elsewhere for a while so that no one else would catch their disease. When that happened they were terribly lonely, but Jesus did something about it by healing them, which often involved touching them – to show His love for them – and then restoring them back to full citizenship. The thing that God did in every instance of loneliness recorded in Scripture was to provide His presence and His help.

I'm sure all of us, at some point get lonely. We probably experienced that in different ways during the pandemic, but in the company of other Christians, we discover a power greater than ourselves, and it is that power of God's presence that gives us the strength to get through our loneliness – assured that we have never been alone for even one moment.

Next Saturday is Armed Forces Day and two weeks from now will be Memorial Day weekend. And every year, on or around those dates, we often hear heroic war stories about those

who survived being held hostage by our enemies. Several years ago there was an article about a retired Army officer who had been held hostage in Vietnam and he said, “Although I was often beaten and tormented, what I felt the most was the lack of anyone caring and I began to realize how withering it is to exist without a single expression of caring around me. Caring is a powerful force, because if no one cares, then you are truly alone.” As Christians, it is important for us to remember and to tell others that we are never truly alone. God is always with us. He always cares, and He especially provides His gracious care through the church.

Jesus told His disciples in our Gospel lesson, as He was preparing to be crucified, “I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you and give you another Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to be with you forever”-(John 14:16,18). Now just imagine how you would feel if you were one of those original disciples who had finally found the One who gave you hope and fulfillment in your life and now He’s telling you that He is going to leave. Or put yourself at the table with the disciples during the Last Supper when Jesus said in the verses leading up to our text, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. Where I am going you cannot come” – (John 13:33). Can’t you just imagine all of us replying just like Peter when He said, “Lord, where are you going? Why can’t I follow you now?” – (John 13:36-37). Peter and the other disciples were facing loneliness. Jesus was leaving and they did not want to be left alone; and neither do we. But just like He has always done, God does something about it. He sends His Holy Spirit to live in their hearts and ours, to comfort those disciples and all of us.

We don’t gather around God’s Word and His Sacrament of Holy Communion every Sunday to simply remember what Jesus did. No, we gather here in this place of worship, because Jesus is here, among us, living in us, and working through us. He has God’s Holy Spirit, who keeps us connected to Jesus. He walks with us, guides us, and helps us every step of the way in our lives.

The Holy Spirit has been described as being closer than our hands and feet, and nearer than our breathing. He is our companion in prayer, our helper in times of trouble, and our comfort when lack confidence and trust. God is always that close to us, and simply knowing that makes all the difference in the world in times of loneliness.

But sadly, not everyone knows that. I have a book that was given to me many years ago titled, “Living Proof.” It’s the story of how Lieutenant Clebe McClary lost his left eye and left arm in the Vietnam War, but through numerous operations was able to recover and retain the usage of the remainder his body. I read a few chapters, but then I put it down as I just didn’t find it to be very interesting. But about a year later I met Clebe McClary and got to know him. So then I decided to try reading his book again, because now, knowing the author, it was no longer boring. As a result, I had a hard time putting it down as the words took on a totally different meaning for me.

Why is the Bible boring and even offensive to many people? Because they don’t know the Author, but when the Holy Spirit works faith in someone’s heart and enables them to know and love God, who reveals Himself in the Bible, then the pages of Scripture become more and more interesting every day. If you are experiencing loneliness, then get to know and trust God’s Word and His promise that we heard today: “I will not leave you,” because despite everything we see, hear, and feel, that is the best assurance in times of loneliness.

While we may not think of people being lonely today on Mother’s Day, loneliness is a difficult and painful feeling, but as Christians we know the presence of a God who always does something about it. When Jesus rose on Easter morning, He ended the power of loneliness. He came back exactly as He promised and He continues to live with us today. That’s why we, like the early Christians, greet each other on Easter morning with the words: “Christ is risen, Alleluia! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!” So whatever you are experiencing today or whatever

you may experience this week, I pray that beautiful Easter greeting will always remain your constant source of comfort.