

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

John 14:18

Several weeks ago we watched the musical performance of “Annie.” Set in the tough times of the 1930’s, it’s the story about a little orphan girl named Annie, left forgotten in an overcrowded orphanage run by a boozy and uncaring Miss Hannigan. Finally, Annie was adopted by the rich Oliver Warbucks, and a whole new life of loving care and security opened to her.

After watching it, I got to thinking what it would be like to be an orphan—to live with this sense that you’ve been kind of “dropped off” — forgotten — just left to fend for yourself in a rather hostile, uncaring, downright mean world. All alone, with no parents or family to care for you, and no assurance that there is someone “out there” who truly loves you and wants the best for you. You live your moments/days on the edge of hopelessness, not knowing what will happen to you tomorrow.

Some days, I suspect, feel like that for you, and even more so, I think, as we age and the years begin taking their toll on us...fewer friends/family around, fewer physical/financial abilities, fewer options. Where’s everybody at—what’s happened...like...overnight!? Am I to go the rest of the way all alone?

Today, the Lord reminds us all yet again: ***“I will not leave you as orphans.”***

BTW, those words were spoken by Jesus before His suffering/death. The disciples were upset enough with all the opposition they’d seen—and it was only ramping up! Surely they didn’t want Him heading to Jerusalem where, as Jesus had warned them, there’d most certainly be trouble. There the One they followed/loved would be arrested by angry crowds, tried in a dead-of-night, kangaroo court, mocked, spit upon, beaten and crucified on a cross. They’d watch it all—helpless and hopeless. They’d feel like orphans.

To these fearful, apprehensive disciples, Jesus promises, ***“I will not leave you as orphans.”***

And what about us? In this world we think of Jesus now, seated on the right-hand of God in the glory of heaven—heaven’s mansions in clear view. Yet here we are—what’s changed!? We’re still hanging out in a sin-sick world. And Jesus...?...He’s where there’s no doubt, no pain, no loss, no sickness, no viruses, no death.

Face it—and we have..all of us!—some days when we’re most weak and vulnerable, it makes us feel like orphans...people forgotten! There is, after all, very little security in this world: the \$\$ fails, the investments...well...just look what’s happened to yours in the last couple of months! And even your once-reliable insurance and safety nets have failed—big gapping holes in the net!

Who cares? Who listens? Is anybody out there?!!

That really had to be like an OT prophet felt as he faithfully and boldly served God in the face of furious opposition. That prophet was ELIJAH. Elijah must have felt like he was on top of the world after beating the false prophets of Baal with the hard-hitting truth of the true God and His unfailing Word. But then the course changed as the wicked Queen Jezebel, chased Elijah with the intent of killing him. Nothing less! And Elijah ran and ran. He felt like an orphan, all alone. No place to hide, no security, no safety net, nobody to trust and help him. Walking for over 300 miles in the wretched desert, there goes faithful Elijah. He’s washed out and he just wants to get it over with !

And then of all things! — God tells Elijah to go back to where he had started...to walk all the way back! Huh? “Go back!” said the Lord to Elijah...*back to where I called you...back to where I promised to be with you and to care for you...all the way back Elijah...no stopping until you get to SQUARE ONE!*

Elijah had forgotten. He had forgotten the promise and power of the Lord...and often—quite often—that happens to us. We begin to feel sorry for ourselves, to feel like orphans, people forgotten about, left all alone, no hope and no help. We forget that the Lord has promised us, ***“I will not leave you as orphans.”***

So..."GO BACK," says the Lord to us, just like He said to His servant, Elijah. "Go back to My Word, My faithfulness, My promise never to leave you nor forsake you." ***"I will not leave you as orphans."***

Look up at My cross, says the Lord Jesus to us. When your sin/death were pummeling you, did I leave you to fend for yourself? ***"NO,"*** says Jesus—I came right to your side. I came to take the hell, the punishment, the death—all of it!—for you. For you I faced the ultimate loneliness/loss: ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** All on My own, I carried your sins away, and My resurrection means that You and I will be together forever with all of heaven's saints and angels.

GO BACK, says Jesus. GO BACK to My Word—it will not lie to you. GO BACK—to your Baptism where I met you with the surprise of forgiveness and new life—abundant and eternal! I made you a child of My Father. Of that very fact, St. Paul writes in Galatians: ***"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."*** Oh...I know...we don't have adoption papers—rather, we have an ADOPTION ACT! Our Savior went into "high gear." He acted to adopt us, hanging on the cross, adopting us in giving His very life for us, showing us at point-blank range God's great/gracious love for us, broken sinners. We are "children of God." We are NOT ORPHANS!

"I will not leave you as orphans," Jesus promised His bewildered, frightened disciples huddled around Him in the Upper Room. They surely thought they were orphans as they saw Him gasp His last breadth on the cross, buried away in that tomb.

But three days later it was a different story completely — JESUS WAS WITH THEM AGAIN. And 50 days later, He ascended into heaven, leaving their sight but not their side. ***"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."*** Go back...back to Jerusalem, hang out there and wait...my Spirit is headed your way. Go back...back to My Word and My promises. They won't fail you—EVER! You are not left all alone. You are not orphans.

So hear this & know this, beloved children of God.

When you face financial strains, you don't face them alone. Jesus has provided for all your needs—in fact, more than you'll ever know! He is with you.

When you face sickness, you're not alone. The Great Doctor attends you.

When those you dearly love are absent from your side, Jesus is not. He is with you—always.

When temptation to forget about Him slams you, Jesus lifts you up—and loves you. He will not let Satan/hell itself get between you and Him!

And when you breathe your last, even in the valley of the shadow of death, you are not alone. You are not an orphan. Jesus—the Risen & Ascended Lord—is at your side and He is leading you HOME. He is the faithful and Good Shepherd who never runs away!

“I will come again and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am...in My Father's house...”

“You are not orphans,” says the Lord to you this day. No matter how bleak it may, indeed, be, you are NOT orphans. ***“I will come to you.”***

He is, you know, coming...and that...rather soon. No orphanages with Jesus...only the Father's house...

Big place, you know...

In the name of + JESUS.