

6th Sunday of Easter, yr. a, 5/17/2020

Acts 1:5-11; John 14:15-21, 25-27

“I will not leave you orphaned ...” – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

The night before his crucifixion and death, Jesus is with his disciples in that upper room. He tells them he is leaving them, but says he will ask God, his Father, and God will give them another Advocate the Spirit of Truth ... who will abide with them, and be in them. “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

3 days later – after Jesus horrible suffering and death – improbably, shockingly, Jesus is back with them, in that upper room ... Risen. In the flesh, fully present ...

Then 40 days later, his disciples asked, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore, when you will heal, when you will reconcile all peoples?” Jesus tells them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for they will receive power from the Holy Spirit, and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. After he said this he was lifted up into a cloud out of their sight. And they are left gazing up.

“I will not leave you orphaned” ...

Whether it is in suffering or in joy it seems there is loss ... grief, feelings of abandonment. We find ourselves bereft. We try to hold onto the joy, but it slips away into the clouds ... we try to move on from pain and grief, maybe even to the point of moving away from those in the midst of it, but it cannot be avoided. We imagine that joy and sorrow are opposites ... each erasing the other. One

precluding the other. But Jesus with his words ... with his death and in his resurrection ... leaving once, then leaving once again, shows that somehow joy and grief are joined, intertwined in some relationship that defies separating them.

“I will not leave you orphaned; ... “

The thing is we human beings leave each other orphaned all the time. It may be that we are so full of our own ideas and opinions and judgments, that someone is not heard, or seen. Or we are so ashamed of our own pain, or sorrow, or actions that we hide from others and from ourselves. Or, it may be that we don't want to think of our own mortality so we try to hold at a distance the illness, the grief of others ... even of those we love, even our own illness and grief. Or, we celebrate on special days with feasting and singing, parades and pageantry— such as Memorial Day, or Easter Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day – yet when the special days are over, or we yearn for them again, we can close our eyes to the sacrifice and suffering of some - the sacrifice and suffering of one - for the sake of our own comfort, freedom and happiness. As if we could exempt ourselves from suffering and grief ...

We try to hold onto the joy, but it slips away into the clouds ... we try to move on from pain and grief, even to the point of moving away from those in the midst of it, but it cannot be avoided forever. Joy and grief are joined, intertwined in some relationship that defies separating them.

It is from the center of this intertwined relationship of joy and suffering, that Jesus says to his disciples, says to us, says to all who may be joyful or fearful, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ... because I live, you also will live. ... you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Jesus speaks of God sending an Advocate – the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. The Greek word translated as “Holy Spirit” is “Paracletos” – meaning to come along side another; to accompany.

We are not left orphaned, because through all our joys and all our sufferings, all our happiness and all our heartache, in God’s Holy Spirit, God abides in us, and we in God – daily in ongoing relationship. Even in absence relationship persists.

As Jesus leaves them once in suffering, and then again in joy, his friends just stand there looking up at the sky. Then quietly alongside them, two beings say, “Why do you just stand here looking up at the sky? Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way ... “ And the disciples are brought back to earth – as are we – to be witnesses to God’s abiding presence – to become Advocates ourselves with God in us and us in God – an abiding place of relationships that don’t pretend anymore that we don’t have wounds, that people don’t know suffering; an abiding place of relationship where all moral injury can no longer be ignored or turned from, but can be seen, accompanied, and be healed. Amen.