

Scripture:

Psalm 66

1st Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

“We are not alone.”

We are not alone ---- and perhaps most importantly we are never alone.

John 14 is all about Jesus offering comfort --- peace and respite --- to His disciples.

It begins with ----- “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” ----- and then in verse 27 --- just past our reading for today --- Jesus says --- “Peace I leave with you ---- my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Last week Jim Kitson preached on the first half of John 14 ----- talking about Jesus as the guide --- and today in the latter part of John 14 --- Jesus assures His disciples that they will never be alone.

“I will not leave you as orphans...” ----- He says in verse 18 today --- and He says this knowing that soon --- very soon ----- He would be leaving His disciples to return to his Father’s right hand in heaven.

But first He wants to assure His fledgling group of followers that God is always with them.

And of course just after Jesus returns to God’s right hand next Sunday at the Ascension --- we come to Pentecost Sunday --- where the Holy Spirit ---- descends --- comes down upon the disciples as they gather in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks.

And so --- just before returning to God’s right hand ---- we find Jesus speaking with His disciples reassuring them that He is not abandoning them --- and that the Holy Spirit will soon come to dwell with them.

And so Jesus stands among His little band of followers offering comfort and peace.

And the comforting truth that Jesus wants to share with His followers is that we are always in communion with Him ---- God is always in our midst.

And of course ---- this is one of the distinguishing marks of a life of faith ---- God is forever with us from beginning to end regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

As Jesus said at the end of Matthew's gospel --- "I am with you to the end of the age."

And ours is the age of the in between times --- the time between Christ coming and Christ coming again.

And the reassurance that Jesus offers today is that we are not alone in this in between time.

Jesus is relieving the troubled hearts of his disciples --- "Do not let your hearts be troubled." ---- He begins this chapter with.

He is sitting around the table with His disciples and they are listening to His farewell words.

And of course the words are reassuring and encouraging.

And they are reassuring and encouraging precisely because Jesus promises permanence of the divine presence.

Jesus promises His followers that God will be with them forever ---even after He Himself is gone.

And the nature of the relationship between God and His people ----- is what we might now call symbiotic ----- it's harmonious --- interrelated --- interdependent.

It's woven together ----- inseparably.

At first glance it can appear as though the blessing of the Holy Spirit --- the eternal presence of God is something that is conferred only under certain circumstances.

“If you love me ---- keep my commands. And I will ask the father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever ---- the Spirit of truth.” ---- Jesus says.

But this does not mean --- do this --- love and follow ---- and then and only then will I --- Jesus ---- go to the Father on your behalf.

It's not do something in order to get something.

It's not love and follow to “earn” the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus goes to astonishing lengths to comfort us and bring us hope not because of anything we have done --- but because of who He is.

The Holy Spirit --- the comfort and presence of God that is about to come in a special and heightened way at Pentecost is not given as a kind of reward for good behaviour or sincere piety.

Instead the Holy Spirit ----- is given freely as an expression of the grace of God.

We don't earn favour --- God's presence is not a reward --- it is a free blessing from God.

It's kind of like the chicken and the egg ----- which comes first ----- who really knows.

Those to whom the Spirit comes live in love and obedience ---- and those who live in love and obedience are the ones in whom the spirit dwells.

The two ----- living in love and obedience ----- and the presence of the Spirit of God ---- are inseparably linked together --- you can't have one without the other.

And Jesus offers these parting words as words of comfort.

Jesus looks on a potentially orphaned community --- He is about to leave ---- - and asks God the Father to send the Paraclete ---- the ruah --- the pneuma - ----- the Holy Spirit --- to be present with them.

And the Spirit --- is not a reward for the church's good behaviour or its sincere piety ---- rather it is an expression of God's grace that the people of God enjoy the presence and direction of God --- the comfort and the peace of God.

And of course without first Christ there is no Spirit.

He is the one who went to God and asked that the Spirit be sent in His physical absence so that His disciples --- His followers --- us ----- the church --- would forever be blessed with the very presence of God forever.

The truth is ---- Christ enables us to see and to experience things that without Him we would never see or experience.

He is our eye opener --- and our soul opener --- and our mind opener.

And not only this --- He doesn't just stop at opening our eyes hearts and minds --- but He then takes all that we see and experience and explains it --- gives it meaning and context.

After talking about giving the Spirit --- Jesus says --- picking it up at verse 7 ----- "The world cannot accept him --- because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him --- for he lives with you and will be in you."

When we know Christ --- when we are blessed by the Holy Spirit ---- we see into the heart of things like never before --- and of course this doesn't mean we're better than others --- it doesn't mean we're loved more by God ----- it does however mean that we have been blessed.

It means God has revealed something to us --- and there is no turning back.

The trick is we cannot expect others ---- the world --- non-believers to grasp the radical truth of the gospel if God has not opened their eyes hearts and minds to it ---- any more than we can expect an infant to understand relativity or quantum physics.

God opens hearts ---- minds and spirits in God's time.

What we know is that we are not alone.

What we know is that we are never alone.

What we know is that we have an advocate --- a guide ---- a comforter.

And what we also know is that we know one who always answers the call.

One commentator I consulted this week stressed that Paraclete --- the Greek word that John uses here for the Holy Spirit --- which has often been translated as comforter ---- advocate --- guide --- and helper ---- might be best understood as --- “the one who answers the call.”

“The one who answers the call.”

Which I think is interesting --- and helpful --- and faithful.

The Paraclete ---- is not only the advocate or comforter or consoler or guide --- but also the one who always answers the call ----- the one who is always there when we cry out for help.

The one who --- as Jesus says --- will not ever leave us orphaned.

God then ---- is the one ---- who answers the call ---- who always answers the call of the weak and of the needy --- us.

Just as a parent ---- or guardian ----- is a Paraclete to their children --- so God is a Paraclete to His people.

A Paraclete ---- takes away the anguish and loneliness of life ----- bringing presence ---- security --- peace and communion.

Which is precisely what happens here in John 14 today.

The pastoral needs of the disciples are addressed not by analyzing their shaky situation ---- but by promising God Divine presence.

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When we find ourselves in shaky situations --- uncertain ---- anxiety provoking circumstances ----- God does not analyze our situation ---- break it down consider it from various perspectives ----- we like to do that but God doesn't ---- we're pretty good and focusing on our circumstances instead of the glory and wonder and comforting presence of God.

When we find ourselves in shaky situations God addresses us by reminding us of His Divine presence.

Very often --- too often ---- we choose to focus on the circumstances and challenges instead of Him.

Unfortunately --- when we find ourselves in challenging circumstances ----- we are often driven to fear and anxiety precisely because we focus on the situation itself instead of the presence of God in the situation.

I am with you always ---- God says.

I will not ever leave you or abandon you ----- Jesus says.

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ for today --- John 14 verse 18 -----
 "I will not leave you as orphans ---- I will come to you."

I will come to you.

I will answer the call ----- I will answer your call.

I will be there when you cry out to me ----- Jesus says.

And He says it not because we've earned it --- not because we're better than someone else ---- not because of anything we have done --- but because of God's goodness and mercy and grace and saving love for us.

We are not alone.

We are never alone.

Jesus ---- God ---- goes to astonishing lengths to bring us comfort and hope.

Even ---- especially ----- during those times ----- when we don't necessarily feel it --- or recognize it ----- God is with us ---- and God is for us --- and God is in us ----- reconciling --- redeeming ----- working out His grand and glorious plan for all of His creation.

When we need it most ---- he comes to us.

Those to whom the Spirit comes live in love and obedience ---- and those who live in love and obedience are the ones in whom the spirit dwells.

It's both and.

We are blessed with a great and powerful foundation on which to build and flourish.

The presence of God is forever and always with --- and in ---- and for us.

Jesus acts ---- the Father provides ---- and we are blessed.

That's the gospel truth.

Jesus acts ----- God provides --- and we are blessed --- it is not our own doing --- it is the grace and mercy and love of God.

We are never alone.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

“Peace I leave with you ---- my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

And ----- especially for today -----

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

There is nothing to get anxious or be troubled about.

The circumstances are secondary --- God's presence is primary.

We have the peace and presence of Christ --- the peace which cannot be altered or taken away by anything of this world.

We have nothing to fear.

He is with us.

Now --- tomorrow --- forever ---- until the end of the age.

And so praise be to God.

In the face of fear --- He is with us.

“How will I ever manage with cancer ---- me --- cancer ----- I didn’t expect this --- what’s next?”----- in the face of all of this He is with us.

“My loved one has MS --- how will I manage --- what does this mean for me ---- for them--- for us?” ----- in the midst of this God is with us.

In the face uncertainty --- “When will I ever find a job --- how will I ever make the next car payment --- or get a new car --- or pay the mortgage or rent --- or whatever? --- in the face of all of these He is with us.

When something happens that we can’t explain --- He is with us.

He is with us ---- He is with us ---- He is with us.

When we’re not sure what to do next ---- He is with us.

We are never alone.

The circumstances are secondary ---- God’s presence is primary.

And His presence cannot be shaken.

His love is greater than anything that this world can throw at us.

In our greatest need --- it’s ----- “I will not leave you as orphans --- I will come to you.”

And so --- we carry on --- living into the next age.

We live in the in between age ----- the He has come --- and will one day come again age --- but we know not when.

Until then --- we live reassured of the presence of God ---- the one who will not leave us alone or abandoned.

And so --- we praise and thank Him.

And we praise and thank Him.

And we praise and thank Him.

Amen.