

Sermon 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Yr. A @ St Johns – 17/5/20

“No longer orphans” (John 14:15-21)

By Pastor André Meyer

Text... Pray: Father, by your Spirit, bless this time as we hear your word, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Way back in October 2000, I went on a ministry trip to Malaysia. Among the many places we visited to encourage the church and share the Gospel, was an orphanage called Rumah Hope, in Petaling Jaya, in Kuala Lumpur.

When we arrived, we got to work spending time with the kids who were staying there. We played games, shared stories, sang songs with them and helped them with their schoolwork. Among them was a 10-year-old boy named Michael. I learned that his mother and father had abandoned him into their care years ago. As our day rolled on, I began to sense that Michael needed a great deal of love and encouragement. So I started investing a little time with him – well, as good as you can with other kids hanging off you! After a full day, in the evening, just before we left, Michael was adamant he wanted to show me something. So I followed. He took me to the place where he slept with the others. When we got there, he opened the single drawer that was fixed under his bed. In fact, all the beds had them. *This one* drawer, 2 feet x 2 feet, had *all* he owned inside it.

Out of a small box he took a little glass ornament, a glass picture with flowers painted on it, and a chain to hang it up. It had a crack running through the glass. He said, “*This was given to me by my mother years ago.*” I was moved that he was sharing such a personal thing with almost a stranger. Then he said, “*Here, this is for you.*” I couldn’t believe it. It was probably one of the only things still connecting him with his *real* mother, and yet, he was giving it away to me, though I had only befriended him for a few short hours.

I told him I couldn’t accept such a gift. But he insisted over and over. He said this was all he had to give me, and so I let him. It looks like a cheap ornament [show], but to me, *it’s precious*. The only thing I had to give him in return was the guitar pick I’d used to play the songs with the kids that day. Truly it was hard to say goodbye. We all left with tears streaming down our faces as the children begged us not to leave them behind. Orphans, given a chance at relationship, became orphans once more. Just a little love, a little time, a little care, can mean a huge difference to someone, ...particularly for those who feel a bit orphaned at this time. Perhaps *you* have felt a little abandoned in this time of social isolation and distancing? Perhaps you have felt a little abandoned by family, or friends, or even God?

In a little way, we should all have some understanding of what it means to be orphaned. For while we may not be literal orphans, we have been orphaned in another sense. Spiritually speaking, as human beings, we were once cut-off from God and His great love. Genesis 3 reminds us that humanity, left to its own devices, disobeyed God and went against His good will for us. We chose to sell ourselves over to temptation, and subsequently, to sin. Instead of trusting and living in God’s wisdom and ways, we sought to go our own way. Since then, we share the family curse of disobedience. And no matter how hard humanity tries to bridge the gap of sin and ‘be righteous’ or good people, time and again we fail to give God the honour and glory He is due. Even as those who’ve been made into God’s children, we struggle with the same problems – and we’ll continue to struggle with our sinful nature until we die.

Just as God’s people of old, we have been left orphaned because of sin again and again. The evil one tempts us to be like the Old Adam and his family – living life in a way that seems good to us, but in the end, only leads to spiritual abandonment, and death. We are tempted on all sides to take paths we think are golden – but are really paved with fool’s gold, which, upon closer inspection, is really worth nothing at all. But thankfully, God doesn’t leave us there – abandoned and on our own.

Particularly because of Jesus and His work in our world we know that we have not been abandoned as spiritual orphans by God. It is the Lord God who *firstly* makes the move to accept us, and then, to redeem and purchase us back from sin, to love and nurture us even though we have separated ourselves from God.

Through Baptism we have received God's gift of a new life, a *new* family name, and a new family. Although, we rightly deserve to remain as orphans because of our wayward lives. We deserve to be left adrift on the sea of despair that we dived into, tossed to and fro by the wind and waves like worthless driftwood... But thanks be to God who does not treat us as we deserve! Because of His deep and abiding love, God has changed the destiny of our lives, from being those who have *no family*, to those who *have* the greatest and most loving family of all.

Today, Jesus gives us a glimpse of one of the benefits of being part of God's family. Though He would soon be leaving His disciples to die upon the cross, to be raised to life, and then, to return to the Father's eternal presence, Jesus promises to them another, one *like Him*, whom He will send. He promises them, *and us*, "*another Helper*," a Counsellor, an Advocate, a Comforter, Intercessor and Defender. The Spirit of Truth, who will lead them into the truth of Jesus: The Way, the Truth and the Life. The Holy Spirit, is identified here by the word '*paraclete*,' which means '*one who stands beside and calls out and encourages*.'

Because you are made God's child through Baptism, God's Spirit lives *with you and in you, and, as such, so does Jesus!* There is no mistaking Jesus' promise to His Church. ...Now, just think for a moment of a courtroom, as there's also a legal sense in which '*paraclete*' is used. And, in this courtroom *you* are the accused. The prosecuting lawyer is Satan, who accuses you before God and every one there of a serious crime. But, your defence lawyer, the *one* who is going to speak *for you*, to counsel you, to walk beside you in that journey, to defend you, help you, and *be your advocate*, is the Holy Spirit. He makes His appeal to the Father for you in the name of Jesus Christ.

And then, the sentence is passed. "*The wages of sin is death*," says God's Law (Rom. 6:23). Because we are orphaned in sin, the debt must be paid, not with money, but with death. Here is where the love of the Father for us is at its greatest. In Jesus, God the Father accepts the wage, the debt on our behalf. And, Jesus literally loves us *to death* by His obedience to the Father's will. He takes our place and is condemned, *and we* are declared guiltless and are set free!

In Jesus' death, our debt is paid in full. *We* who were orphans, now receive the inheritance, love and status of an eternal family we did not previously have. All this from God, by nothing we have done: "*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God*" (1 Pet. 3:18).

So, when Jesus promises His Disciples He *will not* leave them as orphans, particularly, when He physically departs the world, He means it. He does not leave us in this world as orphans after He has paid for us to be in His family. No. Christ promises the Holy Spirit will be our advocate, our comforter, our helper and the One who keeps us united with Him, in God's family. Yes, we are no longer alone and we can return to His promise of our adoption *into* God's family at any time we need. *We have* Christ, we *have* His Spirit, and we also have our Heavenly Father, right by our side, walking with us in each step of our lives. God loves us dearly, and we can rest in His comforting embrace at any time we need.

Our adoption as God's children means *we* are the perfect ones who can *truly* share the joy we've received that others may know the same joy of becoming a child of God's as well. We are orphans no longer sent to adopt all *into God's family* who have been abandoned in this world. Amen.

*Pray: Thank you Father, that you have made us your children and orphans no longer through Christ. Help us to welcome and receive others in Jesus' name, Amen.*