

# Never Alone

## May 21, 2017

### John 14:15-21

This story is from Max Lucado's book, *He Still Moves Stones*. A two-story family home in the Bahamas caught fire. It was quickly engulfed in the flames. The father, mother, and children hurried down the stairs toward safety. As they went, the youngest son became terrified. Panicked, he ran back up the stairs. Suddenly he was alone with the flames.

Jesus says to his disciples, "*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.*" For a few moments, we find ourselves back in Holy Week. Jesus has told his disciples, "*Where I am going, you cannot come...*" His words throw them into a panic. Is Jesus going to abandon them to death? Just when they need him most, is Jesus leaving his disciples? No.

#### **Abundant life means "Never alone."**

Loneliness is a major public health issue. Self-reported loneliness is a better predictor of early death than obesity. It is linked to higher rates of physical illness, cognitive decline and dementia. Loneliness is the number one predictor for depression.

Yet, we don't talk about loneliness. We discuss our diabetes or high blood pressure or heart trouble. Admitting that we are lonely is much harder. Why? Loneliness leads to shame. When we are cut off from relationships, we feel responsible for being alone. We believe the problem is us.

"*I will not leave you orphaned,*" Jesus tells the disciples. Humans are wired to fear abandonment. Loneliness is a pain we cannot bear.

#### **Abundant life means "Never alone."**

We left the little boy facing the flames alone and afraid. No one noticed his absence until they were outside the fiery home. They saw the little boy at his bedroom window, crying. The lower floor and the stairs were now completely ablaze. So the father shouted to his little boy, "Jump, son, jump! I'll catch you!" The boy cried, "But, Daddy, I can't see you!" The boy hesitated as the flames grew closer to him.

Lord Jesus, we can't see you! The darkness of doubt limits our view. The shadow of suffering interferes with our vision. The gloom of grief narrows our perspective. The haze of anger closes our eyes. Lord Jesus, how can we see you?

Jesus promises "another Advocate" to be with us forever. That "advocate" is the Holy Spirit—the living presence of Jesus among us, within us and through us. The word John uses is actually "Paraclete." The word literally means the "walking alongside one." The Holy Spirit is the God who walks alongside us. The Holy Spirit is the one who shows us Jesus.

#### **Abundant life means "Never alone."**

Still the little boy faced flames and death. His father shouted again, "Jump, son, jump! I'll catch you!" The boy cried once more, "But, Daddy, I can't see you!" It seemed he would die in the fire.

“I know you can’t see me,” his father called, “But I can see you.” With that, the little boy jumped out of the window and into his father’s arms. And he was saved.

*“In a little while the world will no longer see me,”* Jesus reminds his disciples, *“but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.”* We may not always see Jesus, but he can always see us. The Paraclete, the walking alongside God, equips us to have better eyes.

Did you practice seeing God at work in the world this week? Some of us did. If you need more cards, you can find them in the pews today. Some of you wrote your responses daily, reviewed them at the end of the week, shared them with another trusted person, and then brought your responses back and posted them on the kiosk in the entry. If you did it, keep it up. If you didn’t, this week is a good time to start!

We are training our eyes to look for Jesus. *“In a little while the world will no longer see me,”* Jesus says, *“but you will see me...”* Like the little boy, we can choose to see with the eyes of faith. The result is life with Jesus--*“because I live,”* he continues, *“you also will live.”* We are letting the Holy Spirit train our hearts to see Jesus. When we see Jesus, we see the face of God.

### **Abundant life means “Never alone.”**

*“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you,”* Jesus says. Jesus comes in God’s Word and the sacraments and our serving. Jesus comes in prayers for healing and wholeness today. Jesus comes to us as the walking alongside God. Jesus comes to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit, the walking alongside God, brings the compassion, connection and courage of Jesus to us. So we are to be the walking alongside people. That’s what it means to be the Church. We are God’s walking alongside people. We are an instrument to tell the world, “Never alone.”

You are so good at this. I am honored to serve a congregation that welcomes and embraces people so completely. No one sits alone here. No one grieves alone here. No one is sick alone here. You welcome new members with open arms—literally! You embrace our children and youth with joy and support. You visit the elders, bring meals to those in need. You are a “walking alongside” congregation.

That is what the Church is for. We walk alongside this culture so twisted by desire, doubt, deceit and despair. We are the Church. We do not abandon the world to its own dying. We remember that God loves the world enough to send God’s own son to die and be raised—for the sake of the world! So we dare not leave this world orphaned by sin, death and the devil.

**Abundant life means “Never alone.”** Abundant life means “walking alongside” for Jesus’ sake. Let’s pray...

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