

“I Will Not Leave You”

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This is the sixth Sunday of Easter, and we still have two more full weeks of Eastertide to go. It is a bit of an odd thing, the way our calendar divides time for us, especially when so many of us are experiencing dizzying monotony of being homebound. Our routines may be disrupted, some days may seem to pass us by in a blink while others feel like they could hold an entire season in between the sun’s rising and setting. Some of you may know the strange sensation of praying Morning Prayer with me several hours after I’ve actually said the words aloud, a miniature version of the strangeness I feel preaching in this pulpit on a Wednesday night, as every cue my senses perceive tell me that it must be Sunday. When it was happening, Lent seemed to feel longer than it ever has before, but now in hindsight it couldn’t really have been forty whole days, right? And yet, the church marches onward, keeping time for us even when we can’t muster the energy to recall what day of the week it is.

We have reached the sixth week of this most joyous season, and the day of Pentecost is on the horizon. The birthday of the church as we know it, the feast on which we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, lies ahead of us, and the empty tomb lies behind us, and we continue to greet one another with Alleluias as if it were still Easter morning. In a season of life when time feels both irrelevant and precious, the wisdom of the church calendar encourages us to keep time to the heartbeat of Jesus, to listen deeply to his words as they are given to us in scripture, echoing across time and space to reach us where and when we are. Our lives are in a state of hurry up and wait, of already and not yet. The cycle of our lectionary, somehow, has met us this week in that in between place, that already Easter and not yet Pentecost place. Our Gospel passage brings us back to the night before our Savior died for us, back to Holy Week, back to Lent. And at the same time, Jesus’s own words propel us forward into Pentecost, to the day when our Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, comes among us.

After washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus sits down with them to tell them hard truths, and to tell them what is to come, and to promise to never leave them orphaned and alone. The

voice of Jesus that we hear today is one from the in-between, a voice between life and death, between death and new life. As the hours and days and weeks turn over and our new normal unfolds slowly before us, we are in between old and new, in between Holy Week and Pentecost, and Jesus speaks directly to us here.

Jesus says “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.” Nestled in between hard truths about suffering and betrayal and the great gift of the commandment to love one another, the promise that we most need to hear right now. I will not leave you. You will see me. I live, and so will you. I will not leave you orphaned. I will not leave you alone. Jesus speaks directly to his disciples, to you and to me, and promises that we will never be parted from him, we will never be without him. This promise is the promise that is made to us and fulfilled in us at our baptism, and every day after. We are marked as Christ’s own forever, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, because in the waters of Baptism we abide with God and God abides in us. Once baptized into Christ’s body, we need never fear that we are alone again. During in-between times, when we feel wrung out by anxiety and grief and loneliness and even boredom and frustration, this is the Gospel word to us. We are not alone.

It is important, necessary even, for us to hear this, to keep hearing it over and over again until it is etched on our very souls. We are not alone. God will not leave us, God abides with us and in us. This is the Gospel truth, a good word for those who believe. But we are not the only ones who need to hear it, we the virtually gathered faithful. Our baptism means that we are marked and sealed as Christ’s own body, but it also means that we are responsible for the good news that we carry. There is a whole world full of lonely people who believe that they are alone, that they have been left behind and forgotten. Some of them belong to our own family, our own community, our own parish. Maybe right now you feel like you might be one of them. The good news of God’s unfailing love for us does not belong to us alone, but to all the children of God even and especially to those who feel lost and forgotten. The first letter of Peter compels the faithful to “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” The hope that is in us is that same Holy Spirit that was promised to us at our baptism, that same spirit of truth that Jesus promised would abide in all who love him. The hope that is in us does not belong to us, but is a gift freely given through us to

a world hungry for hope. The same message that is so poignant for us in this season of in-between is a message that our disconnected and divided world needs now more than ever. Time will stretch and sprint and drag, but it is still Easter, and Christ is risen. The further apart we must stay, the more separated we must be to protect one another, the more desperately we must labor to deliver the message that nothing can separate us from the Love of God. The world is demanding of us a witness, an accounting for the hope that is in us. On what is your hope founded?