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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

As many of you know, I attended my first two years of seminary at a Presbyterian seminary in Richmond, Virginia. Debbie and I moved to Richmond immediately following our wedding the summer of 1972, and our first apartment together was an apartment at the seminary in married student housing. Following my first year in school, we got summer jobs at an orphanage just outside Barium Springs, North Carolina.

At Barium Springs Home for Children, Debbie and I got to know orphans in a way that we had not known orphans up until that time in our lives. Debbie worked as a life guard at the swimming pool and in the arts and crafts program, and I worked as the recreation director on the playground and athletic fields and taught Sunday morning education to high school students at the church that was affiliated with the Home.

Debbie and I were only 22 years old and didn't know anything about the circumstances that brought any of the children to the orphanage. We heard that there were numerous children there whose family could not afford them. We surmised that there were also children there whose parents were deceased or who had in some way been abused and neglected. But we didn't know for sure.

What we did know was that there were angry children at the orphanage who did have a sense that they had been abandoned. We knew their anger on the playground, in arts and crafts, in the swimming pool, and in Sunday morning education. Some of the older students were, in fact, dangerous to be around.

It was a significant opportunity to see first hand what it meant to a child to be abandoned by those upon whom a child would normally depend. And it was often the case that summer that our hearts were sad.

To be orphaned is, from one perspective, to be left behind. Jesus uses the word in our Gospel reading for this morning. The setting of this Gospel reading is Jesus' last supper on the Thursday evening before the Friday that he was crucified. And, in a sense, Jesus is saying good-bye to his disciples. Jesus is attempting to explain that in the events that are to follow that supper, beginning with his betrayal that evening, he was going to be heading to his Father's house in heaven. Jesus' explanation, of course, was confusing and disturbing to the disciples and they did not fully understand.

It is important to understand the relationship between the disciples and Jesus. The disciples had left their families to follow Jesus. And Jesus had even made it clear to them that it was his expectation that they would leave their families and follow him. As he called them to be his disciples he said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

These things the disciples had done. They had left everything – including their families – to follow Jesus. And they had formed a new family. Jesus was at the head of the family and they were the members together of the family. And so it was that as Jesus was now explaining that he was leaving, ultimately to go to his Father's house, it was a desperate time for the disciples. They did not want to think that their trust had been misplaced. They did not want to think that Jesus had betrayed their trust and now had plans to abandon them.

And Jesus knows these thoughts. And it is precisely these thoughts that Jesus is addressing when he says to his disciples in these verses, "I will not leave you orphaned...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the spirit of truth...he will be in you."

Surely these words had to be difficult for the disciples to understand as well. But what Jesus was foretelling in these words was that which was yet to transpire after he had been raised from the dead and after he had ascended to be with his Father in heaven. And what was to transpire was that he and his heavenly Father together would be sending to the disciples the Holy Spirit. He speaks of the Holy Spirit in terms of an Advocate, or a Helper and speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth.

This event of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples did, in fact happen. It happened on a Festival Day on the calendar of the Jewish people that was known as the Festival of Pentecost. And even though, at that time, all of the disciples were Jews, they were about to become Christians, followers of the risen Christ. And in the life of the church that they would initiate, the Festival of Pentecost would take on new meaning. Forever afterward it would be celebrated in the church as that day when Christ, together with his heavenly Father, gave to the disciples on earth the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was to make sure that this gift would be given in order that his disciples would not be left orphaned. Jesus recognized the commitment they had made to him, wanted to respect the commitment they had made to him, and did not want to leave them alone, on their own, to try to be that which he wanted them to be on their own power. So he gave them a Helper who would lead them deeply into Christian truth and assist them in sharing that Christian truth ultimately with the whole world.

That Festival Day of Pentecost continues to be celebrated in the Christian Church today. It is the third most important festival on the calendar of the church, after Easter and Christmas. The Festival of Pentecost moves around on the calendar because it is tied to Easter and Easter, of course is a Festival that moves around on the calendar. But we celebrate the Festival of Pentecost every year on the eighth Sunday of Easter, which this year falls on Mother's Day, May 11. Even this morning, we anticipate the celebration of Pentecost soon to come.

The gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was a gift that has lived on in the church. The Holy Spirit, we believe, continues to live within us and among us in the Christian Church today. The Holy Spirit is that Helper who continues, all our lives long, to lead, us, also into the truth that is Jesus. You and I are not left orphaned, any more than the early disciples were left orphaned. We have the Spirit of God, bestowed upon us in our baptisms, living within us and among us to lead us into the truth of Jesus.

Some may not be aware of this great truth. Some may, in fact, feel orphaned. Some may, in fact, feel that they have been left on their own to figure out the truth of this earthly life on their own. For the baptized people of God, to think such thoughts is to be unaware of the power of God himself at work in the heart of faith. Whatever the circumstances of your life these days might be, know this to be the truth. There is a Helper living inside of you, the Holy Spirit of God. And it is the goal of that Helper to continue to lead you deeply into relationship with Christ. In order that you, too, might not be orphaned. But live with him and with his people in his Father's house now and forever. Amen.