

Little Orphan Annie started as a comic strip run in newspapers introduced in August of 1924. As a comic strip it was no longer in print around 2010. However, it has lived on as “Annie”, the musical and movie. Perhaps, you have some passing acquaintance. It is built around the adventures of a poor orphan, Annie, who is taken in by a rich man, Mr. Warbucks, who changes her life completely from one of poverty and loneliness to have now having a real family and home.

We don't use the term, ‘orphan’ very often today in our country. But there still are many ‘orphans’ – children whose parents have died, or perhaps, more often, those who have been deserted by one or both parents. Others because of the neglect of their parents have been removed from their parents care. It is a sad reality of a sinful world. Now, for the most part we have closed the orphanages in our country and social services seeks to place these children in temporary foster care with the hopes that many will be adopted into new homes. Overseas the situation is often far more critical. As a result of wars, disease, and poverty many children have no place to turn. They are often without resources, without family, and truly alone.

Maybe given our present isolation due to this pandemic, we can better understand. Seniors in nursing homes unable to have direct contact with those that they love. Friends and relatives unable to just get together. Children out of school and for the most part isolated from personal contact with friends. Yes, and church members unable to gather in a normal way with fellow Christians in worship and study and fellowship.

In our text, Jesus is about to leave the disciples – to die – be raised to life and then after a short time to ascend into heaven. Visibly Gone! So he speaks these words of our text to comfort the disciples *and us* when we struggle with feeling alone – when we set our foot on the path of life and the future seems so uncertain or even very dark – when we know not the joy and especially the sorrows (the potholes of life) that lie ahead. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** Yes,

THEME: YOU ARE NOT ORPHANS!

John chapters 13 through 17 capture the later, the last words of Jesus. He instructs his disciples. He offers encouragement for the dark days that lay ahead. It ends with his High Priestly prayer in John 17 where he prays to the Father: **first for himself**, that he might complete his work; **then**, for the **disciples**; and **finally, for all in the future who would believe**. Jesus seeks to reassure them – ‘I will leave’- ‘I have been your teacher and your mentor, but you will not be alone – **YOU WILL NOT BE ORPHANS!**

Listen to Jesus' words, **“15If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- 17the Spirit of truth...”** Isn't it so simple!?! Those who love Jesus – obey his commands. Such **LOVE IS BORN OF FAITH**. For the unbeliever, as much as he or she protests to the contrary does not love Jesus, rather hates Jesus. But **LOVE THAT FLOWS FROM FAITH – LEADS TO OBEDIENCE**. Like the little child, who loves his mother – when asks, ‘Would you bring me my scissors?’, replies, ‘Yes, mommy’, and brings them. It just flows out naturally. *Perhaps, it might be better translated*, not ‘**IF**’, but ‘**Since**’ you love me, you will obey my commands...” Jesus reinforces this statement later, **“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.”**

To what **COMMANDS** is he referring? It is more than the Evangelical Command to believe and preach the Gospel. It includes more. Later Jesus said, **“This is my command: that you love each other.”** His commands include all – Love God above all else and Love your neighbor as yourself.

Where does such **LOVE COME FROM?** Perfect and unselfish!?! Not from within. Natural man hates our holy God! The Apostle Paul tells us, **“the fleshly mind is enmity toward God”**. When our conscience warns - speaks **LAW** and says that not only are the obvious acts of Adultery, Murder and Violence are sin – but anything that puts God second in our life: is sin. Yes, the boat on the lake on Sunday morning or the golf game that leads us to **neglect hearing the Word**; the **laziness** that is often reflected in our work or care of family; the **greed** that drives to “add field to field” to **store up treasures on earth** – not heavenly treasures – are sin. When the preacher, or the Bible or our conscience speaks **LAW**, the natural reaction is Hate not Love.

Jesus says concerning the Spirit (Holy) who speaks **TRUTH**, the unbelieving world does not see, or know or accept – the truth he speaks. The only response is anger and hatred!

Where does such **LOVE COME FROM?** There is only one source. **“We love because he first loved us”** We were by nature separated from our holy God because of our sin. Before the creation of the world, he took the initiative – for a world that did not know him – did not love him. For **ME!** In the words of the great hymn writer, Isaac Watts, ‘Alas, and did my Savior bleed...die’, Yes, ‘for sinners such as I!’ God sent his Son – in human flesh

but also true God. He was obedient to the Law in our place. NOW he was about to depart – to face death. In our text, Jesus spells it out for the disciples, “**Before long, the world will not see me anymore.!**” And die he did for sinners like you and me. Jesus later says, “**Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for a friend.**” He died in payment for our sins and then he rose in victory over sin and death. What amazing LOVE! His Easter victory is our victory! What a promise, “**Because I live, you also will live!**” Life with Jesus NOW, BY FAITH and eternal life with him in heaven!

What love he has for us! Jesus pictures that love in the parable of the Prodigal (Lost) son – like us he squandered his father’s gifts - wasted them. He comes home dirty and hungry – totally unworthy. But the Father was waiting – he saw him at a great distance. Someone gave this parable a different title, “The Parable of the Waiting Father”. I like it better. The Father waiting – looking down the road in hope that the Lost Son would return. Such Love! Ready to welcome back his repentant son. What wondrous love! Even more amazing is Our Father’s Love. He first loved us!

As God touches hearts – as we see His Love – as the Holy Spirit leads us through the Word to believe – there is a change that takes place. The Apostle Paul describes that change, “**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...**” There is now by faith a new part in us that says, ‘Jesus, whatever you desire – I too desire!’ A new creation by faith, that hates sin – that loves to obey!

Oh, in this life such love will not be perfect. As Christians, we still have our sinful flesh – that still needs the club (threats) of the Law to drive us to daily come before our Holy God with humble heart – to confess our sins and then receive his assurance that our sins are forgiven – AND TO FIND IN CHRIST’S LOVE THE DESIRE to set aside the sin that so easily trips us up and to live for Jesus! A new person – as God supplies the strength – Obeys!

It is to the Christian TODAY (as to the disciples in our text) that he gives this promise. To you who have confessed your faith in his saving work and promised to love him and to serve and obey him – you have this promise, “**I will not leave you as orphans!**” Church teachings may change over time(for better or worse), pastors and teachers may come and go but Jesus still sends the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament so we can be assured, we are part of a family (of Christians). We have a Savior will never leave us or forsake us – no matter how dark the days of our lives may be. You are not alone! YOU ARE NOT ORPHANS!

He promises, “**18I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...20On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.**” “IN” really means, ‘in the sphere of’. Although we cannot see him, by faith we live in the same ‘sphere’. Note the close relationship, Jesus sends the Spirit of truth to believers. Jesus is inseparable from the Father. Now we are in Jesus and he is in us joined inseparably!

You are not Orphans. Jesus promised that he would send “another Counselor” to be with the Disciples, FOREVER! To be their teacher, their guide, their counselor. NEVER ALONE! And in a dramatic way he kept that promise at the first Pentecost, when he sent the Holy Spirit to open their eyes – to guide them in all truth and to make them bold to speak. The Spirit would help them to more completely See God’s Love and to better respond with Love! No longer Orphans, but now filled with Jesus’ peace and joy and love.

Jesus promised, “**I will come to you...and you will see me**”. Oh, they would only see him for a short time (40 days after the resurrection), but Jesus would be with them – he would be in their hearts by faith and ever with them. He also is in our churches, in our homes, but most important in our hearts. With his Word he assures, “**Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” With Jesus at our side we have family even if we have no earthly family or even if we are separated by time and distance from them.

This time of years so many face major changes in their lives. Many will struggle with loneliness and fears. Many graduate from high school or college and move on to college, to serve in the military or other work – to new places, experiences and new people. Some will stand before the Lord’s altar to confess their faith and an undying faithfulness to the Savior. Some are faced with serious health problems, troubles with work, or in the family. All of us have experienced a measure of isolation and a longing to be together with those that we love because of the recent restrictions due to the epidemic. But we are never alone! We are part of a family of believers that has as its head, Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit he lives in our hearts. We are not orphans! Take his Word and Sacraments with you. Through them he helps us to remember his continuing love and guides us to show that love for those who are around us. In him we will find our comfort and life until he calls us to himself in Heaven – NO MATTER WHAT LIES IN THE FUTURE. We are never alone – we are not orphans. Through Jesus we are truly, “Children of the Heavenly Father”.

AMEN