Sermon for Sunday 17 May on John 14.15-21

Today marks the end of Christian aid week and normally we would be receiving into churches the donations that members of our congregations would have collected door to door. Sadly this year we have not been able to do that, but i still want to thank all those who have done this in previous years. Across our churches are many people who have shown and continue to show enormous sacrificial dedication, hard work and perseverance in supporting organisations like Christian aid, so thank you. The light of Christ shines out through you even in this period of Covid 19.

Today I want to focus on one verse from the Gospel reading. John 14 verse 18, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

The definition of an orphan is a child whose parents have died, a child being somebody under the age of 18. Though some people extend this to mean anyone who has lost both parents. In the Greek it also includes disciples who are stripped of their master, so has a particular meaning in this context.

The gospel writer John puts this statement from Jesus within the last discourse, the farewell speech of Jesus to his disciples. They have finished the last supper, Jesus has humbled them by washing their feet and is now giving final advice, teaching, and instruction. He has told them that he will be killed and has promised that he will ask the Father to send another advocate, another counsellor, the Spirit of truth to be with them forever. They should be encouraged, for this Spirit will live with them and in them.

You can imagine the disciples saying, that all sounds very dandy, all well and good, but what about you? We do not like this talk of your death, of you going to the Father. If you leave us we have nothing. Everything will be stripped away. And Jesus gives the reply: “I will not leave you orphaned, I am coming to you. This is already planned. You will see me again after my resurrection, fully alive, but not everyone will see me for I will only reveal myself to my followers, my disciples. You. Then you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you.  - you will finally understand this truth.”

The disciples have to go through the horrific experience of the cross to come to the resurrection, Jesus fully alive again. These experiences become the turning point of their faith, the watershed beyond which their understanding of who Jesus is and the inclusive nature of their relationship with him and the Father becomes clear. I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you.

Sometimes we need to have our cross and resurrection experiences, through which we have to walk, before we fully understand the nature of our relationship with God, with Jesus, of how we live in him and he in us.

Maybe some of you feel that now. This current isolation, this period of uncertainty makes you feel bereft, like an orphan, alone, lacking the love and support of others. If that is how you feel, hold on to the promise of Jesus to his disciples, that he will not leave them orphaned, that he is coming, and that when he comes the truth will be revealed as to the nature of how we are entwined with God the Father and Jesus. We are in them and they in us. Repeat and meditate on this promise and let it become real for you, a reality within you, a rock, a foundation upon which you can stand, an understanding of the relationship we have with God. God the Father extending the relationship he has with Jesus his Son and with the Holy Spirit, to us. Including us in their relationship, bringing us into their triangle, including us in their love for each other, so that we can receive and rejoice and live in that love. Never left as orphans.

To return to Christian aid, their website states that in recent years in Kenya over 1 million children have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS. The traditional support systems of extended families has buckled under the strain of this huge HIV epidemic and the basic needs of many children are not being met.

To give an example, when she was 15, Jackline Adhirrbo's mother died of AIDS. No other relatives came forward to take them in and Jackline was left to care for her five younger siblings.

She said:

'It has been difficult because the food is not always there. Sometimes you have to go without food and sometimes the children just cry and you have to sleep without food.'

There are tens of thousands of children in Kenya, like Jackline, who have had to take on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings after losing their parents to HIV.

Not only do they miss out on adult parental love and support but they also miss out on quality health, education and social services. Many will not receive critical immunisations, they are less likely to enrol in school, will probably suffer malnutrition and stunted growth, can be exploited, neglected, displaced, left destitute or left for dead. Life is tough and of the 160,000 children under 15 years living with HIV, less than half get the lifesaving antiretroviral drugs they need to survive.

For children like Jackline, being an orphan not only has huge emotional losses but enormous strain in just living. And the threat of coronavirus makes this even more challenging.

They need support. We can be loco parentis at a distance by donating to Christian Aid, we can offer our love to them by our sacrificial giving. Be the giver of the promise of Jesus, help them to know they do not stand alone, for we stand with them, offering our love, our support, our encouragement to them. Help them to know the love of Jesus through our love for them. Amen.

Give on line to Christian Aid at

[https://www.christianaid.org.uk](https://www.christianaid.org.uk/)

Or send a cheque to Christian Aid, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL