

Sermon – Easter 6A (Mothers' Day)

This message was taken from LCA online resources with some amendments made in discussion with Pastor John Strelan and Pastor Neil Stiller.

This message is based on the Gospel reading, John 14:15-21 and I will focus on Verse 18:

Jesus said to his disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you".

According to UNICEF there are 153 million orphan children worldwide with over five and half thousand new orphans every day. The greatest number are in sub-Saharan Africa, which includes Somalia, with 49.4 million orphans. That's almost twice the population of Australia. Whether in refugee camps in Kakuma in Kenya, the world's largest refugee camp, Jordan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Ethiopia, India, Romania, Bulgaria, or South East Asia these figures are mind blowing especially knowing the tragic effect that the loss of parents has on children and how this loss shapes the rest of their lives.

Even a child left without parents here in Australia, although infinitely far better off than those in many other countries, is affected in ways that we don't fully understand. Children who lose their parents lose their security and are vulnerable and powerless physically, emotionally and psychologically. The love and care given to them by others will, in time, make up for this but unfortunately, some children never get over their loss. Some never get over the psychological wounds that comes with being an orphan. It's as if they have lost their story, their roots, their history, their identity, their sense of direction.

In the light of this, the words of Jesus take on a special meaning when he says. *"I will not leave you as orphans"* Or this could be translated, *"I will not leave you alone, deserted, abandoned, unloved, desolate or without a future"*.

The disciples knew Jesus in a very close and personal way. They had walked together, talked together, eaten together, shared good and bad times together. The disciples had been constant companions of Jesus. They felt confident and safe in the presence of Jesus. When they experienced doubt, pain and suffering, they felt Jesus understood what was happening to them.

When they were filled with joy and happiness or overcome with sadness and sorrow, they felt secure in the knowledge that Jesus experienced the same emotions and feelings as they did.

When they were hungry, Jesus fed them and a great crowd with a few loaves and fish.

When they were in danger on the sea, Jesus was nearby to rescue them.

When they witnessed the grief that death brought into their lives, Jesus was at hand to comfort and raise the dead to life.

You see there is a kind of fatherly or perhaps brotherly relationship between Jesus and the disciples.

Jesus knew that his disciples were dependent on him. In fact, Jesus occasionally addressed them as "little children". In the presence of Jesus they were like "little children" who relied on his love and comfort.

When Jesus warned the disciples that he would no longer be with them he had to quickly assure them not to be worried and upset, but to trust him. Now if that's how they felt before Jesus' death, imagine how alone and abandoned they must have felt after Jesus' death on the cross. Under the shadow of the cross, Jesus knew that they will feel like orphans—lost, without hope, helpless, powerless, uncertain about their future and confused. So he makes them a promise in John 14: verses 16, 18 and 27:

"(Verse 16) I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...(Verse 18) I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...(Verse 27) Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"

Note this unique way Jesus reminds us that we will always have a home and a family. He says, in John 14:20 *"I am **in** the Father, and you are **in** me, just as I am **in** you."*

This is a good passage to pause and consider. Simply what Jesus is expressing is the very close and intimate relationship between himself and the Father, himself and his disciples and his disciples and God. That tiny word "in" describes a special bond, a unique oneness. A family relationship.

God wants no one to feel like an orphan. When Jesus says to us *"I will not leave you as orphans"* he means that we belong to the Father, adopted and claimed through Jesus the Son. We are loved by the Father. We are forgiven by the Son. When there are members of the family who are feeling alone or despondent, like an orphan because we have had a falling out with someone, as a member of this special family, it becomes our responsibility to make amends, whether it was our fault or not.

When there is a member of the family who is feeling like an orphan—lonely, scared, uncertain because they are facing illness and even death—as a member of this special family, it becomes our responsibility to pass on the love and care that we have received from our heavenly Father.

When there are members of the family who are feeling like orphans—feeling unloved, needing a guiding hand, wanting someone to know their pain—as a member of this special family, it becomes our responsibility to be a brother and sister to that person and let them see the love of our heavenly parent through us.

When there are members of this special family who are feeling like orphans, needing someone to provide them with basic essentials and to empathise with them in their circumstances, it becomes our responsibility to be a brother and sister to that person and let them see in us the love of our heavenly Father as we meet those needs.

Jesus' words need to become our words to one another as people of God's family *"I will not leave you as an orphan"*, as we reflect the love and care of God into the lives of the people around us. Let

Jesus inspire us to say to our fellow brothers and sisters, *"I will not leave you alone, deserted, abandoned, unloved, desolate or without a future"*.

During the 1992 summer Olympics in Barcelona, a young English athlete, Derek Redmond was hungry to win a gold medal in the 400-metre race after being forced to withdraw from the previous Olympics because of injury. However, shortly after the start of the race, he popped his right hamstring. All the other runners continued the race leaving him on the ground, in agony, alone, like an orphan. Amazingly, Derek got back up and started hopping towards the finish line. By then, all the other runners had all finished the race. Derek, in tears, slowly and laboriously kept hopping. It looked as if he would fall any moment.

Suddenly, a man appeared beside Derek. It was his father. He had run down from the stands and pushed his way through the security guards to reach his son. Derek's father put his arm around his son and let him cry on his shoulder. Then, with his father holding him up, Derek hobbled to the finish line and then he hopped over the line by himself to finish the race. The look on the father's face is one of love and care for his son. Derek was disqualified because he had assistance in the race and nobody cared, least of all Derek, who knew that his father would always be there for him. There was also hardly a dry eye in the stadium.

This is an example of a father's care and love for his son. Today, on Mothers' Day, we give thanks for all mothers. We recognise those living in a family with children, those mothers in a blended family and mothers who are single either by choice or circumstances. We also recognise those women who cannot or choose not to have children and those who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, illness or tragedy.

Putting aside all the commercialism of the day and the fact that this is the busiest day of the year for restaurant lunches, we thank all mothers for their unconditional love, we recognise them as the heart of the family, and acknowledge the many sacrifices they make. In the words of the famous American poet, Emily Dickinson: *"A mother is the one to whom you hurry when you are troubled"*.

We also acknowledge that in many households, mothers are the spiritual head of the family. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5 *"I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded now lives in you also"*.

To all mothers - thank you.

Our mothers and fathers are so important to us at any age. And even more than that, there's a word of hope for all of us to help us finish the race of life. It is God's own word. When we are feeling like orphans to run the race of life in this world—a race we cannot run by our own strength—we, like Derek Redmond and his father have a heavenly Father who gives us his strength to keep on going, a Saviour who walks beside us and the Spirit who comforts us and strengthens us in faith, pointing us to everything Jesus said and still speaks, enabling us to cross the finishing line. We are not

abandoned, because we have a God who loves us. He says to each of personally and individually, "*I will not leave you as orphans*".

And the peace of God which passes all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Easter 6A