

"No Jesus, No Peace; Know Jesus, Know Peace!"

Acts 17:22-31; I Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 25, 2014

Friends, it's a lovely little hymn that we sang as the Hymn of the Day just a few moments ago: "CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER." This is a hymn that was written by a young Swedish woman named Caroline Sandell; the daughter of a Lutheran pastor in Sweden, way back in the 1850s.

Miss Sandell was a woman blessed with a **strong Christian faith**. She must have been **quite the poet**, for she wrote some 2000 hymns in her lifetime; 650 of which were actually published in three different collections.

When you do some research on this hymn, some commentators will tell you that Miss Sandell wrote this hymn when she was 26 years old, in 1858, at the time of her father's death—who died tragically in a drowning accident. But more careful research reveals that she actually wrote this hymn, eight years before that, when she was only 18 years old.

The INTERNATIONAL SITUATION was such that many riots that first began in Paris as part of the French Revolution were now spilling over into other European cities; into the cities of Sweden also. It was a time of great political unrest among the nations in Europe. Miss Sandell's native country of Sweden had sent military troops to Denmark to help subdue a rebellion that was taking place in Germany.

This is what one **HYMNOLOGIST** wrote about Miss Sandell's authorship of this lovely little hymn: **"In the midst of these revolutionary and turbulent times, a small and sick Caroline Sandell sat in her favorite ash tree in the yard of the parsonage where she was living and wrote about the safety of God's people in a world that is violent and coming apart at the seams."**

Let me repeat that phrase to you again: "Miss Sandell wrote about the safety of God's people in a world that is violent and coming apart at the seams!"

When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ shares these magnificent words of our Gospel lesson this morning with his TROUBLED DISCIPLES IN THAT UPPER ROOM OF JERUSALEM—on the night before was crucified—well—in many respects—THEY WERE ALSO LIVING IN A TROUBLED WORLD THAT WAS COMING APART AT THE SEAMS.

Yes, they were gathered together with our Lord in a room where they would celebrate with him the Passover Meal for the last time. It was on this night that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, leaving for them an example that they should give their lives away in joyful service to God by giving their lives away in joyful service to one another and to other people whom they would minister unto in this world. It was on this night that Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But it was also on this night that he said, "A new commandment, I

give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another!" (John 13:34-35)

Like the Good Teacher that Jesus always was, he pauses periodically to sum up the important truths that he has just shared with his disciples in our Gospel lesson this morning. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you!" (John 14:15-17)*

JESUS IS PREPARING HIS DISCIPLES FOR HIS ABSENCE, AND YET PROMISES THEM THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT WILL SOON BE Poured OUT UPON THEM. *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you 'another Helper!"*

The two Greek words that are translated as "ANOTHER HELPER" here are **allon parakleton**, which is translated in the NIV as "Another Advocate," and in the RSV as "another Counselor."

The word parakleton most literally means "**one who is called alongside of you to help you**" and is **ACTUALLY LEGAL JARGON** for someone who stands beside you to represent you in a court of law. **Isn't this why still today judges on the bench sometimes address the representing attorneys with the title "Counselor"?**

TO STRENGTHEN HIS PROMISE THAT JESUS WILL SEND TO HIS DISCIPLES SOME MAJOR REINFORCEMENT IN THE GIFT OF HIS HOLY SPIRIT that he would one day, in the near future, pour out them in full force, he goes on to say, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you! Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you!" (Vv. 18-20)*

It does make a difference when someone comes alongside us when we are in need.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. In some instances the Holy Spirit comes with **POWER**. At other times, the Holy Spirit comes as **GUIDE**. But there are times when we need a **FRIEND, A COUNSELOR, A COMFORTER**. Then the Holy Spirit serves in these capacities as well. **BUT WHY DOES JESUS SAY, "I WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER ADVOCATE . . ."**

The Apostle John wants us to know that **THE SAME GOD WHO WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF IS THE SAME GOD WHO WILL BE WITH US IN OUR TIME OF NEED** through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit; and it **REALLY IS TO OUR ADVANTAGE** THAT AFTER JESUS HAS RECONCILED US TO HIS HEAVENLY FATHER THROUGH HIS PERFECT LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION, THAT HE ASCENDS BACK INTO HEAVEN AND POURS OUT HIS HOLY SPIRIT UPON US—SO THAT HE CAN BE PRESENT WITH ALL OF US, WHEREVER WE GO, ALL THE TIME—TO GUIDE

US, TO COMFORT US, TO EMPOWER US FOR MINISTRY; to clarify our sense of mission and to give us the strength we need to live as Christ's followers in this world!

All this is wrapped up in that short little phrase: *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever!"* (v. 16) Then Jesus goes on to add a very important footnote to this sacred promise: *"Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you!"* (v. 17)

AS I WAS STUDYING THE WORDS OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING, SUDDENLY THE THOUGHT CAME TO ME: "No Jesus, No Peace; Know Jesus, Know Peace!"

"N" – "O" JESUS, "N" – "O" PEACE, "K"-"N"-"O"-"W" JESUS, "K"-"N"-"O"-"W" PEACE.

In other words, it is God Himself who comes alongside us any time we are hurting or in distress. He is our COMFORTER, OUR COUNSELOR, OUR ADVOCATE, OUR COMPANION, OUR FRIEND. This is amazing good news to everyone who calls upon Christ in a time of need. The God of all creation does not forget us nor forsake us. Rather, whenever we are hurting, he comes alongside us.

"The safety of God's people in a world that is violent and coming apart at the seams!" Certainly, anyone who is aware of our world situation today knows that we also are living in a world that is violent and coming apart the seams. For **two of the big news stories in recent weeks have been about a world that is violent and coming apart at the seams.**

(1) THERE IS FIRST OF ALL THAT SENSELESS KIDNAPPING OF SOME 200 PLUS NIGERIAN GIRLS, FROM THEIR NIGERIAN SCHOOL, BY THE MILITANT TERRORIST GROUP **BOKO HARAM**. Many of these girls were Christians, but now are being forced to convert to Islam.

Why even the President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, recently cancelled a visit to the village where the girls were kidnapped, fearing for his own safety. According to the NEW YORK TIMES, a government official said, "SECURITY COULD NOT BE GUARANTEED IN THE VILLAGE OF CHIBOK, 80 MILES FROM THE STATE CAPITOL. THE ROAD PASSES THROUGH TERRITORY LARGELY CONTROLLED BY THIS SAME TERRORIST NETWORK; VILLAGES THAT BEAR THE TRACES—BURNED SCHOOLS, EMPTY HOUSES, OF EARLIER BOKO HARAM ATTACKS."

A video of the girls that was released this past week both reassured and distressed their parents, who are angry about the government's inability to help.

(2) AND THEN THERE IS ALSO A GREAT DEAL OF UNREST AND ANGER AT THE GOVERNMENT IN TURKEY THAT FOLLOWS A COAL MINING ACCIDENT IN WHICH 301 MINORS DIED THERE IN A FIRE.

Over the past decade, many men whose fathers grew tobacco, wheat and barley, put down their pitchforks and found work in the nearby coal mines on the promise of more money and greater security in the form of health insurance and pensions. **With the demand for energy to fuel the economic expansion soaring in Turkey, coal became important, providing more opportunities to men in places like this, but little national attention has been given to the slow pace of modernization.**

(3) AND THEN MUCH CLOSER TO OUR OWN SHORES, THERE ARE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS RIGHT HERE IN OUR OWN NATION, who seem to have received less than adequate medical care from those entrusted to run our V.A. hospitals.

(4) AND THERE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE LOSING THEIR HOMES RIGHT AND LEFT BECAUSE OF WILDFIRES THAT ARE BURNING TOTALLY OUT OF CONTROL IN SUCH STATES AS CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA.

And then we are invited to listen to these words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson this morning, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him!"* (John 14:18-21)

Friends, the promise of the Bible is that those who believe in Jesus will naturally love him, and that love will become visible in the way that those people who genuinely are Christ's followers in this world respond to the needs of other people all around them! If we love Jesus we will do the things that he has told us to do! Our "works" will be the evidence of our faith and love for Jesus.

Fortunately, Jesus does not leave us alone to do his will, however. He told the disciples that he would ask the Father to give them another Counselor to be with them forever.

During the course of his earthly ministry, when Jesus' first disciples were living in close communion with him, day by day, for almost three years, Jesus was the only Helper the disciples needed. But he had told them that he was going where they could not follow. So he and the Father would give them another Help, namely, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would always help them as they expressed their love for Jesus. The Spirit reveals the reality of God. He keeps us connected with Jesus; He is God with the Father and the Son, and he always ministers to our spirits in the great gift of God's Holy Word and blessed sacraments.

What if the resurrection happened and no one told anyone about it? There wouldn't be a church; no one would know Jesus ever existed; the world would be an entirely different place. I've heard it said that the church is always just one generation away from extinction. Often this is said out of fear that this generation will be the last, but when I hear this, I marvel at how Christianity has passed from one generation to the next for two millennia. And did our Savior also promise, *"I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!?"* (Matthew 16:18)

Does this mean that you and I will never become the victims of injustice or subjects of senseless violence in this world? Not hardly! Listen to what St. Peter says to us in our Second Lesson today from I Peter 3. *"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil!"* (I Peter 3:13-17)

I always find it amazing; absolutely amazing how the appointed Scripture lessons on any given Sunday complement one another so very beautifully, as well they should for after all, one of the great hermeneutical principles for interpreting the Scriptures correctly is that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Paul is spending time in Athens, awaiting the arrival of Silas and Timothy. Paul and Timothy and Silas have all been run out of town on a rail, in those recent cities where they worked to plant new churches—in places like Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. But Paul certainly doesn't retreat from doing what he knows God has called upon him to do: *"To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Ephesians 3:8).

Paul does not witness to the educated men of Athens on Mars Hill, first of all, by telling them what complete whack jobs each of them are, theologically speaking, for being polytheists and claiming to believe in many different gods. No, Paul seeks to build a bridge to these men. Even though his spirit was provoked within him when he saw the city full of idols, he also found one altar with this inscription: "To the Unknown God." And Paul uses this recognition as a jumping off place for which to preach the Gospel to men, whose curiosities were peaked, because they had heard about the Gospel, but never really heard it!"

Paul skillfully says, "What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you!" (v. 23)

**"Children of the Heavenly Father, safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven, such a refuge ere was given!**

**"God his own doth tend and nourish, in his holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things he spares them; in his mighty arms he shields them.**

**"Neither life nor death shall ever, from the Lord his children sever;
Unto them his grace he showeth and their sorrows all he knoweth.**

**"Though he giveth or he taketh, God his children ne'er forsaketh.
His the loving purpose solely, to present them pure and holy! Amen" (LSB 725)**