

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Deacon Ben Remmert
Sunday, May 10, 2026

Acts 17:22-31 Psalm 66:8-20 1 Peter 3:13-22 John 14:15-21

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

The last time I was here in the pulpit I asked you a question, “How is your Easter celebration?” This week I admit it was hard to celebrate as my son Asher got sick with the flu and I had to care for him. However, the joy of caring for sick children in the Remmert household is catching up on our Netflix watchlist, a hard thing to do during busy weeks of school and work. What brings me joy especially is when my kids get to watch what they call “classic films.” One such film that I got to watch this week is *Despicable Me (2010)*.

Despicable Me traces the exploits of self-proclaimed villain Gru (Steve Carell), whose life goal is to be internationally recognized as a master criminal. In this goal, we come across a rival villain Vector and plan to one up him with plans to steal the moon. However, through his attempts to one up Vector by stealing his shrinking ray, Gru comes across three orphan children Margo, Agnes and Edith. He thinks they might be able to help him become a master criminal. Initially, his relationship with the girls is very stiff. But as time passes, he comes to know and appreciate the fullness these three young girls bring to his life. Gru realizes he must make a choice that changes all their lives, to which is adopting these three young girls. Gru transforms from a self-proclaimed villain into a loving parent figure that will not abandon Margo, Agnes, and Edith. This film is such a hit with its core themes of redemption and love, unconventional family that is built on love and care, overcoming emotional trauma of neglect to form healthy bonds, and adaptive growth through challenges. But it gives us warm feelings when Gru promises the girls he will not leave them.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned.” An orphan is adrift with no community to call their own. It’s a lonely and vulnerable place. There are many ways that we can feel orphaned. We can feel orphaned when both of their parents have died. We can feel orphaned when we’ve moved to a distant location, far away from family and friends. Immigrants who leave home and country behind them can feel like orphans in a strange land. We can feel orphaned and alien if we sense that we don’t fit within a social setting. We may feel orphaned when we are surrounded by the news of how the world is on fire and rising prices of living. So, there are many orphans beyond the strict definition of an orphan.

Jesus made his reassuring statement on the night of his arrest. He knew that his life was going to take a dramatic turn, and soon. This would change the intimate relationship he'd shared with his disciples. It would forever be altered. He spoke these words to assure them in his pending absence. Even though he would no longer be with them, God was not abandoning them. God would become present with them in a new way. It seems a little out of sync to be reflecting on this passage from Holy Week when we're well into our season of Easter. But the reason this text shows up today is because Thursday of this week will be Ascension Day. After Jesus rose from his tomb, he appeared to his disciples for forty days. On that final day, Jesus was with his disciples in rural area east of Jerusalem. He gave them a blessing. And then, before their eyes, he was carried upwards and out of their sight. So it makes sense to hear this passage today, on this final Sunday before Ascension Day. The daily reality of the disciples will radically change.

So Jesus assures them, "I will NOT leave you orphaned!" His departure will bring on the coming of another heavenly presence. Jesus calls it "The Advocate." The Holy Spirit is called to dwell with us, beside us, in us. Jesus promises that after he departs, another heavenly presence will walk beside them. This Advocate accompanies us through all the windings and avenues of our lives. From here we as the ELCA often feel that our reflection of loving our neighbor is through this accompaniment model.

When we accompany someone, we walk with them. We step into their situation, we feel their struggles, we encounter the world through their perspective. In accompaniment, we share their joys and sorrows and everything in between. We don't walk with them only on sunny days and on pleasant pathways. We're with them also through their difficulties and painful realities. This is what the Holy Spirit does with us. God's Holy Spirit is ever present with us. It's not in a way that can be physically seen. But maybe that makes it even closer. God's Holy Spirit walks with us, before us, and behind us. The Spirit is within us, beneath us, and above us. This Advocate is to our left and to our right. The Holy comforter is with us when we sit down and when we rise, when we lie down in sleep and when we awaken to a new day.

God's Spirit accompanies us now as sure as God has always promised to accompany us. When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush and called him to confront Pharaoh, God said, "I will be with you." When Joshua led Israel after Moses had died, God promised him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." When Israel faced exile and challenges, God vowed, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." And when Jesus departed from his disciples, his final words were a promise: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Friends, the Spirit of God, our Advocate, is with us in all times and in all places. We are not alone. We are not left orphaned. You are loved. Amen.