

(Jesus said) *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,"* (John 14:18)

Never Alone in the New Year

A certain pastor from California once wrote in his church newsletter about the experience that one of his members had when he went through major heart surgery, and his experience has an important reminder for all of us. Quoting from that newsletter:

"The day before Bob's surgery an attractive nurse came to visit him and told him that she would be his 'recovery room nurse.' She took hold of his hand and told him to hold and feel her hand. She then explained, 'During the surgery, you will be disconnected from your heart and be alive only by virtue of machines. When your heart is finally restored and connected in new ways, you will eventually awaken in the recovery room. But you will be totally paralyzed, for perhaps as long as six hours. You will be conscious and will hear and know what's going on around you. Then I will be at your side and will hold your hand as I do now. Though you will be absolutely helpless, when you feel my hand, you can be sure that I will not leave you.'"

"Then Bob said it all happened just the way the nurse had predicted it would happen. When he awoke after his surgery, he literally could do nothing. He could feel, however, that the nurse's hand was in his for hours on end, just as she had promised it would be. Later on Bob said, "That did make a difference."

Yes, it does indeed make a difference when we go through challenging circumstances or difficult experiences to know that we are not alone. It is a great help to know that family members or friends are there to help and support us. But it is an even greater comfort to remember the promise our Lord Jesus has given to all of us who trust in him as our Savior. *"I will not leave you as orphans,"* he has promised. *"I will come to you."*

There are times in our own life when we too feel totally helpless - when the situation looks dire and even hopeless from our perspective. There are times when we too are "paralyzed," so to speak - paralyzed by fears and worries. There are times when we too are fully conscious of what is going on around us, but are powerless to do anything about it. Yet the comfort we have is that we are never alone, never "orphaned," not even for a split second. Our Lord Jesus is with us always.

***"I will not leave you as orphans,"* Jesus says. *"I will come to you."* This is the wonderful and comforting promise he has given us, both as individuals and also as a congregation, with regard to the new year of 2014 into which we have now entered. Even though the days which are now before us may lie shrouded in mystery to us, we do have the assurance of our Lord's abiding presence in each and every one of them. Because of the promise he has given us, we can face this new year with confidence and optimism.**

Even though we do not know what joys or sorrows, what gains or losses may lie ahead in this new year, we do know that whatever comes to us will be *"a good and perfect gift"* from the loving hand of our Savior who walks with us daily, whose wisdom is perfect and whose judgments are unsearchable. Remembering this is what will take away any fears we may have and any worries that may plague us.

Even if we should be called to *"walk through the valley of the shadow of death"* on one of the days of this new year, there he too will come to us. There he too will hold our hand in his and will never let us go. Because of this, we can be at peace, knowing what is waiting for us on the other side. We know that we won't be condemned for our sins when we stand before God's judgment seat, because the blood of the Savior who is walking with us has cleansed us completely from their guilt and condemnation. With our hand in his, he will lead us safely through that frightening valley to the everlasting bliss and glory he has promised us in his heavenly mansion.

***"I will not leave you as orphans, "* our Lord Jesus says, *"I will come to you. "* That's his promise to you and me and to our congregation as well. In this new year, he will come to us to bless us with his love and with his power to provide for all of our physical and temporal needs. In the days that lie ahead he will come to us with his grace and compassion to provide for all of our spiritual and eternal needs through his holy Word and sacraments - to comfort us daily with his forgiveness; to bless us with his peace; to fill us with the hope he has given us; to endow us with the courage we need to face the trials of living in a sinful world; to strengthen us in our faith so that we may overcome the temptations of the devil and persevere in our Christian calling.**

***"I will come to you, "* our Lord Jesus assures us. For us too this is what will "make a difference" in the year of 2014. Because of this, we can rest assured that we will always be in good hands. With his grace and mercy our Lord will be with us to bless us in our personal lives and to bless our efforts as a congregation in the work of his kingdom. That's reassuring to know, isn't it? It's even more important to always remember.**

Blessed by the Love of Jesus

Pastor Terry