

On Tuesday, the Food Bank of CNY gave away 59,000 pounds of food to 1000 households. Fresh food. Paid for with a NYS grant, and purchased from local farmers. Milk, eggs, potatoes. There were stories of a man who was fishing from the creek on his property so that most days they had some fish to eat. Families who just learned that the landlord is raising the rent, and the unemployment benefits are no where to be seen.

And on and on the stories go The first man in line arrived 4 hours early and had driven from Watertown. There were lots of tears and prayers of both thanksgiving and safe passage for the food bank volunteers. One man drove his electric scooter 6 miles from Syracuse to be in line.

Folks were so desperate; so thankful.

I think we might need to prepare ourselves to have scenes like this become more common in the new tomorrow. I find it all hard to imagine. Many of these folks had never stood in line for food before that day; too many of them saw their lives collapsing around them. You could hear the strain of fear behind their stories.

This is a part of the new landscape, the new world into which we are moving. We are making a journey into the unknown much like our ancestors who stepped on ships long ago and moved to this foreign land. Like them, we will grieve what must be left behind – beloved faces of family and friends, familiar places and rituals which hold such rich memories. Life will have a new rhythm, a new language. It is a bit fearful.

Whenever people of faith are confronted with unknown dangers, in times of fear and anxiety, we reach for the ancient stories, the witness of other people of faith who have struggled before us. We look for a sign, a promise, some hope to see us through.

So today we hear Jesus say “I will not leave you orphaned.” Speaking into the depth of our most primal fear of abandonment, of living and dying alone and anonymous, these are powerful words. “I will not leave you orphaned”.

You see, it was time for Jesus’ incarnation to end. It was time for him to return to the Creator from which he came. Just like you and me. There will be a time when the breath that sustains us will leave for the last time. His disciples would see him no longer; no more fish dinners by the lake or late night talks. It was time for him to go....knowing this, he reassures the disciples that although things might look different, they will never walk alone. “I will not leave you orphaned.”

These words of comfort echo through the centuries – consoling disciples of every generation including us. The first disciples were believers who were put out of their family synagogue because of their belief. There were believers who faced the lions of Rome, and storm troopers and racists; those who faced down the Black Plague or the great famine or covid. “I will not leave you orphaned”

How can that be?

Jesus tells them: “ I am sending you another Advocate.” Another advocate. One like me. To walk alongside you, to teach and to guide you, to strengthen you when you fear and comfort you in the night. This One – This Spirit – this Holy Spirit – will be everywhere and always with you like the very breath that you breathe, like the wind that moves at will, sometimes a gentle breeze and sometimes so powerful it bends trees to the ground. I am sending you this Spirit to be your aide and companion, to give witness on your behalf, to pray for you before the throne of God. I am sending another Advocate so you are never alone.

I think it would be easy to dismiss this ‘new’ Advocate, this Spirit who blows where it will, a presence we cannot see or touch, as a second string player especially for those who had known Jesus in the flesh.

Do not be fooled. This Spirit is that which binds together the Father and the Son. This is the Spirit that moved across the water at the moment of creation and connected Father to Son in the river Jordan. This is the Spirit which Jesus hands back to the Father in his dying, the Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit now abides among us. This Spirit binds us together in Christ and draws us into the very heart of God. The one Jesus calls the Other Advocate – intercessor, companion, witness, aide, teacher, guide, comforter – is the power of life, the Spirit of the Living Jesus.

I will not leave you orphaned, Jesus promises. This Other Advocate, this powerful Spirit, will accompany you wherever you go, whatever you face, abide with you no matter what. This Spirit not only gives you life, but through you, brings life, and comfort, guidance, and aid to your neighbor. This Holy Spirit makes the group of believers at Trinity, Herkimer a powerful force for the care and love of their neighbors.

So we do not walk into the unknown future alone. Whatever we may need to leave behind; whatever fear we carry with us, we walk with the Advocate close at hand – the Holy Spirit of the living Jesus – a powerful witness to the grace, forgiveness, and life we know in Jesus. Thanks be to God.