

**The Sixth Sunday of Easter (and Mother's Day)**  
**May 9 & 10, 2026**  
**American Lutheran Church**  
**Rev. Lisa Hackler**

**Acts 17:22-31**  
**Psalm 66**  
**I Peter 3:13-22**  
**John 14:15-21**

When my mother died, a woman in my congregation in Alaska said to me, “We are both orphans now.”

At the time, I thought that was a little dramatic. The word *orphan* brought to mind Oliver Twist, or a child standing alone in the world. Orphans to my mind, were children — not grown adults who had been living on their own for decades. But on another level, she was not wrong. The two people who had brought me into life were now gone. My mother was gone — my imperfect mother, who had told the best bedtime stories when I was little; my mother, whom I did not always appreciate as a teenager; my mother, whom I came to trust and confide in as an adult. And I missed her terribly.

My mother had an interesting relationship with her own mother. She once told me that her mother's most prized possession was a little typewriter. But when my mother wanted to play the viola, her mother sold that typewriter to buy the viola. It was a simple sacrifice. But my mother never forgot it.

These were not perfect mothers. But they had their moments. And it does not hurt to remember those moments. Maybe that is part of what makes Mother's Day tender. It is not only about perfect love. It is about remembered love. Complicated love. Sacrificial love. Love we understand better only later.

And into all of that, Jesus says to his disciples: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” Jesus says this on the night before he dies. He is preparing his disciples for a departure they do not understand. He has washed their feet. He has spoken of betrayal. He has told them he is going away. And they are troubled. The room is full of love, but it is also full of anxiety.

I remembered that feeling later when I had children of my own. Sometimes my husband and I would be getting ready to go out for the evening, and there would come that moment when the children sensed what was happening. We were getting dressed, but we were not getting them dressed. My older daughter would catch on and say, “Momma, where are you going?” And I would say something like, “Remember, Sarah, Daddy and I are going to a restaurant.” She would frown and say, “But who will take care of me and Teresa?” And I would remind her, “April is coming. You remember April. April is going to stay with you.” She loved April. But that was not the only question she needed answered. “And when will you be back?” Those are the questions of a child who does not want to be left alone. Who will take care of me? And when will you come back?

And in the fourteenth chapter of John, that is very close to what the disciples are asking Jesus. They do not know how to say it exactly. They ask about where he is going. They ask about how they will know the way. But underneath all the words is the ache of people who are afraid of being left alone. So Jesus gives them a promise. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

Now, I realize comparing the Holy Spirit to a babysitter is not exactly a complete doctrine of the Trinity. But it does get at something. When a parent leaves the house and a child asks, “Who will take care of me?” the answer is not simply information. It is comfort. It is reassurance. It is a promise: You will not be alone.

And Jesus does not say to his disciples, “You will be fine. Figure it out.” He does not say, “Try harder.” He does not say, “Hold everything together by yourselves.” He says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.” That word translated **Advocate** can also mean **Comforter, Helper, Counselor**, one who comes alongside.

And maybe on Mother’s Day we understand both sides of that word.

There is the fierce side. I am not sure I have ever felt so fierce as when I thought one of my children was being treated unfairly. There is something that rises up in you. You may be polite. You may be reasonable. But underneath it there is a fire: *Someone I love is being hurt, and I am not going to pretend that is all right.*

In Alaska, I learned you never want to get in the line of sight of a mother defending her cubs. Anyone who has lived near bears knows that. Bear spray, guns... it doesn't matter, you don't want to surprise a mamma and her cubs. Because there is nothing on earth more ferocious.

That is one side of advocacy. Someone stands with you. Someone speaks for you. Someone will not let you be forgotten, dismissed, or left undefended. But there is another side, too.

The Advocate is also the Comforter. There are few images more tender than a baby resting in the arms of a mother or father. The child may not understand anything about the world. The child cannot explain what is wrong. But the child knows the feel of being held.

Now, not everyone hears the word "mother" and thinks first of comfort. For some, the stronger memory may be criticism, distance, disappointment, or grief. Mother's Day can bring all of that into the room, too.

But the image still holds. The deepest kind of comfort is not denial. It is not pretending everything is fine. It is being held in the truth. It is having someone near enough to say, "You are not alone. You are still mine. I am here." And Jesus says that is what the Spirit will do. "I will not leave you orphaned." That is the center of this Gospel.

Jesus does not promise that his disciples will never grieve. He does not promise that they will never be confused. He does not promise that love will never hurt. He does not promise that the people they depend on will always be there in the same way. He promises this: you will not be abandoned. "The world will no longer see me," he says, "but you will see me; because I live, you also will live." That is Easter language. That is resurrection language. The disciples are about to see Jesus arrested, condemned, crucified, and buried. They are about to feel as if everything has been taken from them. But Jesus is already speaking from the other side of death. "Because I live, you also will live." Not because you are strong enough. Not because you understand everything. Not because you can hold yourself together. But because Christ lives.

And then he says of the Spirit: “You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

That is more than being watched over. That is more than having someone nearby in case of emergency. That is God coming close enough to dwell with us, and even within us. The Holy Spirit is Christ’s promise that we are neither undefended nor alone. The Spirit advocates. The Spirit comforts. The Spirit reminds. The Spirit strengthens. The Spirit keeps bringing Christ near. And that matters because all human love, even the best human love, is imperfect and temporary.

The mothers and fathers and grandparents and teachers and neighbors and church members who loved us did not love us perfectly. Some came closer than others. Some tried hard. Some failed badly. Some gave us gifts we only recognized years later. Some left wounds we still carry. Some are gone now, and we miss them terribly.

Mother’s Day can hold gratitude, grief, regret, longing, and tenderness all at the same time. But the Gospel speaks beneath all of it. “I will not leave you orphaned.”

In Acts, Paul stands in Athens and says that God “is not far from each one of us.” And in John, Jesus says it even more intimately: the Spirit “abides with you, and he will be in you.” God is not far away. Christ has not abandoned us. The Spirit has not left us to manage life alone.

So today we give thanks for **every** love that has held us, fed us, prayed for us, defended us, corrected us, and stayed with us. We give thanks for the mother who sold the typewriter to buy the viola. We give thanks for the mothers and fathers who came back when they said they would. We give thanks for the babysitters, grandmothers, aunts, neighbors, teachers, friends and church members who helped us know we were not alone.

And we also bring to God all the places where human love was not enough.

Because beneath every good love we have known, and beyond every love that failed us, stands the promise of Jesus: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” And because he lives, we also will live.