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“In Our Aloneness, He Comes”

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:18

SPECIAL MUSIC: Give Me Jesus

Fernando Ortega

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuGrM6sNhc>



MY ALONENESS

The candle was snuffed,
And I sat in the darkness
Lost in my confusion,
Unaware of the sparseness
That surrounds me.

That light from that candle
Can never return
All others are pale
Even as they burn
Cannot set me free

There is a certain weight
That traps my soul
Almost comforting
Though monsters troll
Hidden in the dark

Leave me here
In my aloneness
Allow me to mourn
My existence
No light, no spark

With no light
There be no shadows
All is black
In the hallows
Of what was my soul.

All I ask
Is that you leave me be
Let me mourn
In my misery
My eyes useless in my pain

Let me be angry
At the Lord of Creation
Rather than gather
In meditation
Let the blood fall like rain

So Jesus came
And sat with me
No words were spoken
No apology
Jesus wept

And together
We sat in dark
He the light
Me the spark
Comforting me in my aloneness.

My dad passed away in 1978 and it was hard on us all. Ten years later in 1988, my mother passed as well. My sister, God bless her, was the one that took care of my mother. I wasn't as involved as I should have been, a weight that I have carried and still have a great deal of trouble laying down. After the initial dust had settled, and was mother buried next to my father in east Texas, the area of the country they both loved so very much, it finally dawned on my sister and me that... well... we were orphans. We were both in our 30's but the realization still came as a blow. The two people that we had counted on most in this world were no longer there to encourage and protect us. Mom had always told us that we needed to be good to each other because there would be a point when she and dad were gone. Here we are, 35 years later, and my sister and I still miss them. We are orphans caring for each other.

We are all familiar with that feeling when a candle is snuffed out in our lives, the death of a parent, child, relative, or close friend. There is a dark place, a void, that occurs when we lose someone that we are used to having around to confide in, to share our pains and our joys, to offer advice when we need it.. People who walk the path with us and we can count on to have our backs. They are the people that sat in the dark place with us through other voids in our lives. And then they are gone. The last candle against the darkness. Or so we think in our despair.

There may be others willing to step in, but it isn't the same. And we don't want to offend those reaching out to us, but truly, it just isn't the same. Sometimes, we feel that we will not be able to step out of that darkness, to leave

the void behind us. We want to be alone in it. We want to grieve in our own way within. We are almost attracted to the place where the candle was, hoping that it will be rekindled once again, even though we know it isn't possible.

At times like those, we tend to push Jesus away as well. Having anyone near us, even Jesus, can seem like a distraction for our pain. It can almost be like we find some comfort by being alone in our suffering. We believe we can heal on our own if people will just let us be. But more often, we find a greater comfort knowing that someone is sitting in silence beside us allowing us to be alone, yet able to reach out if we sink too deep.

So many people believe there is no way for God to understand this part of the human condition, the depth of darkness found in grief. But I want to remind you of Jesus and Lazarus. Jesus knew that Lazarus was sick, yet he chose to wait another day knowing that Lazarus would die. And when he comes to Bethany and meets Mary and Martha in their grief, he listens as they say, "Lord, if only you had been here, he would not have died." Their grief was overwhelming. They had entered that dark space. A space where people want to lash out, blame God, blame fate, blame family, blame someone, anyone for allowing what happened to create this void in their lives, a hole so deep they cannot find the way out.

And then we read the shortest verse in the Bible.

"Jesus wept." John 11:35

Do we believe that Jesus was grieving for Lazarus? Not likely. Jesus came to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew what was about to happen. He knew that he was going to call Lazarus from the grave and that Lazarus would come forth and be whole. An event witnessed by so many people. A miracle of monumental proportions. So, no, Jesus did not weep for Lazarus.

One of the biggest arguments that occurred among the Jews of the Old Testament was that God wasn't human so God could never understand the human condition, or suffering, nor any of the other struggles and joys that humans experience. How could he? God is the Creator! God is beyond all that.

But here is one of the beautiful truths that came out of the birth of Jesus. We tend to think of it as a one way relationship, that Jesus came to teach us and to save us, and we are grateful for that. But we seldom think about what God got out of this arrangement beyond saving us from our sins and bringing us to his throne. Through Jesus, God was able to experience that extent of human emotion that can only be understood by living within a mortal corporal body. It is difficult to understand the emotions surrounding mortality when you are immortal. It is impossible to grasp the angst of the human experience when you have no starting or ending point to your existence. So the question wasn't without merit.

Jesus wept. Not because Lazarus passed, but because he experienced that grief that Mary and Martha felt from the candle that had been snuffed out in their souls. He experienced that void by being with them in that dark moment. In the darkness of their despair, he sat with them, experiencing their pain as they

tried to pull the darkness around them and shut everything out. As they sought to place blame on something out of their control. Jesus could not experience that loss within himself because he knew that Lazarus was about to be raised. His perspective was different. He knew that Lazarus' death wasn't permanent. Jesus grieved not for Lazarus, but for Mary and Martha as they were overwhelmed in their loss and despair. Jesus empathized and wept with them in their aloneness and pain.

At the same time, Jesus had to focus on his purpose of raising Lazarus, which was not to ease Mary and Martha's pain, but to further the Kingdom of God. It was God that needed to shine in all his glory in this moment. The raising of Lazarus was meant to reveal that the Son of Man / Son of God was capable of defeating death, of taking away death's sting. It was a portent of things to come, a preparation for the people to better understand that Jesus would conquer death, even in his own passing. That death no longer held sway over the children of the Almighty.

And while that was the focus of this moment in his ministry, he did not forget those who mourned the passing of Lazarus. He made sure that in this confusing and dark time, he wept with them in the darkness. He mourned with them because they were hurt and feeling empty. Alone. Defeated. For Mary and Martha, death was the primary event. The candle that was Lazarus had been snuffed. For Jesus, defeating death was the primary event. Jesus was there to relight the candle that no one believed could be relit.

As humans, we stumble in the darkness when the candles around us get snuffed out. There is often the feeling that Jesus just doesn't have the time or the patience to sit with us. We also find out that there are many people around us that want to distance themselves from our pain. Like that is the normal thing to do. We kind of lump everyone into the same category and don't expect anyone to enter our darkness, even Jesus. Why would they? We are so miserable, why would anyone want to remain in that darkness?

But the truth that God wants us to know is found in our scripture today:

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Jesus isn't worried about what anyone else does. He is going to step into that black void and sit with us. He may not say a word. But that really doesn't matter. What matters is that Jesus understands and insists on sitting there until we find the strength to get up and move past the moment. He walks beside us back into the light. We never, ever, ever have to face the darkness alone. Even if we have been ranting and raging at God because we believe that he is ultimately responsible for our pain. Truth being what it is, that pain is coupled with the human experience. And God understands that. And trust me, he can take anything we can throw at him without flinching and never leave our side.

And while I have focused on the darkness of death, there are so many times that we feel that God has forsaken us. The moment that the doctor tells us that we or our loved ones have cancer. Those times when there is a horrible, disabling accident. Those moments when we find ourselves financially destitute.

Divorce, disease, disfigurement, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and moments when we feel devalued. Jesus sits in that despair with us, even when we blame him for those events. He doesn't judge us. He knows it is the pain talking. He knows it is our human nature that looks for a place to point and blame someone or something for causing our pain.

Jesus sits patiently. Jesus weeps with us. Jesus is there in the moment. He will not leave us to our own devices. We are God's children. We are the brothers and sisters of Christ.

Throughout the Bible we find men and women who struggle with 'aleness.' Aleness is not the same as loneliness. Loneliness is a feeling that occurs when we are without companionship, that feeling that no one cares about us for whatever reason. Aleness occurs when we are overwhelmed by our circumstances and are not even sure if we would welcome another's company. Loneliness pushes from inside out. Aleness crushes us from the outside in.

While Job, Samson, Elijah, Paul, and so many more do show us the evidence of a state of aleness, where they are being crushed by outside forces and feel like they are having to stand alone, it is best described by David who also shows us how we should deal with it. He's being chased by Saul and his army all across the hills as he constantly seeks shelter and resources. But he never waivers knowing that is it God who will provide. You know these words. I give them to you in the original King James Version because I know that is how you memorized them. Speak them with me now if you remember.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul:

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23

David knows that whatever the circumstances, no matter how stressed he is, no matter how hungry or thirsty he is, God is beside him and will not only provide for his needs, but exceed those needs with abundance. My cup runneth over. Not even the possibility of death would turn his eyes from his Creator. He accepted his lot and allowed God to comfort him and sustain him.

By allowing God to use us, we become the tools to sit in the darkness with others. Sitting in silent prayer and lifting someone up is the greatest kindness we can show someone who is in pain.

I was reminded of that this week. Friday was the anniversary of my heart surgery. So much has happened since this and it seems like it was more than three years. It is also the anniversary of the heart attack of Dana Bland, my fiancé. Although she hung on to life while I struggled to recover, her family eventually allowed her to rest. Before they told me of their decision, Jimmy Wells, her brother called Barbara Murphree to come be with me at the parsonage while he delivered the news to me. I was alone at the time. My son had returned home and Jimmy and his family were in Odessa. The fact that Barbara dropped everything to come and be with me when Jimmy explained the situation meant the world to me. There was nothing that Barbara could do but be with me there in the moment. There was no way she could lift my spirits. She couldn't make the darkness go away. She couldn't kill the despair I was feeling in the moment. But she was there, lifting me toward my Creator. God was shining his light through her to comfort me as I collapsed in the void of loss around me. Barbara knows how very much that meant to me.

Maybe you have done the same thing for a friend or relative, or even a perfect stranger. That's what it means to be a Christian. A follower of the Son of God. To be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. To make a difference among the suffering and anguish that is all too prevalent today. It's not about going to find someone to comfort. It is about allowing God to use us to sit in the void and take on the darkness when we are allowed into those places of pain. What a privilege it is to be able to be used by our Heavenly Father in this manner.

This week, let us think about how we are allowing God to use us. Are we drawing lines in the sand and saying, “You can use me to do this, but not do that?” Are we open to where the spirit leads us? Are we able to drop the things that we think are important to do the things that God knows are important? Allowing God access to the deepest recesses of our spirit is HARD! I won’t tell you otherwise. It is human nature to try and keep things from not only the people around us, but from God. The difference is that God already knows. He also knows the condition and the willingness of our hearts to serve. We can make a huge difference in someone’s life just by making ourselves available. And so often, all that is asked of us is to sit in someone else’s pain for a while, so that they will not fall into a state of aloneness.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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