

***We Are Not Alone* – John 14:15-21**

**Rev. Matt Nieman**

**May 10, 2026**

Are you all familiar with the concept of quiet quitting? Quiet quitting came to prominence during and immediately after the pandemic a few years ago when there were these huge upheavals in the workplace due to the safety restrictions imposed upon all of us.

Employers, to keep staff working, determined that many white-collar employees could work from home. And because of the flexibility that gave employees, many workers saw opportunities to possibly alter their careers and who they worked for. Over the years, some workers had started growing squeezed by their bosses—expected to work longer hours that affected a healthy work-life balance.

As part of employees feeling empowered by the Covid pandemic, feeling they had leverage in the workplace, many of them started “quiet quitting,” or doing just the minimum they had to do to keep their jobs, all the while keeping their eyes on new possibilities for work—whether in their field or another field altogether.

Jesus’ words to his disciples in this passage are part of a much larger section of the gospel of John known as the Last Supper Discourse (or sometimes Farewell Discourse) in John 13-17. The main thrust of this Discourse throughout these chapters is Jesus’ impending return to his heavenly Father and what this means for the disciples he is leaving behind in the world. Jesus’ remarks range broadly and include

exhortation, encouragement, predictions and promises. And these verses in John 14 encompass a number of these themes.

The disciples had been growing in their relationship with Jesus. They had witnessed him performing miracles—feeding the five thousand, walking on water, healing, and teaching. They had experienced his compassion as he washed their feet. So, as he predicted his own departure, his betrayal and death, could they not have helped but wonder, “Will we soon be all alone?”

And it’s in this moment when we could make a judgement over whether Jesus would soon embark on his own journey of quiet quitting.

The scene helps us answer this question. The answer is in the form of a promise to his disciples and to us. Jesus says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth.” Counselor—the term is derived from the Greek word “parakletos” and can be translated as helper, companion, friend, or comforter. It has become synonymous with someone who “stands alongside with” someone else in need.

This parakletos, however, is not a substitute for Jesus, but rather an extension. Absent his physical presence, this parakletos would be Jesus’ ongoing presence with those disciples.

In his upcoming departure, Jesus was not giving up, not abandoning, not “quiet quitting.” Instead, despite the Heavenly Father’s plan for that painful path to the cross, Jesus’ death would not mean separation. This counselor, companion, and helper, that is the Spirit, would assure that the disciples would not be left alone.

Jesus did not “quietly quit.” And because of that, we also have the assurance that we will not be left alone, will not be left hopeless when the world around us seems to be caving in.

Jesus describes vividly what being left alone might be like. He uses the word “orphaned” and says, “I will not leave you orphaned.”

That word, “orphaned,” triggers images in our minds. Most often, we think of children abandoned by their parents. Imagine a child’s future without the loving guidance of a parent nurturing them along their growing-up journey.

Abandonment like that can be somebody quiet-quitting on us or loudly quitting on us, saying, “I’m done with you.” Sometimes, being abandoned is tragically unintentional—some sort of accident that leaves a child parentless.

No matter the type of abandonment, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, says to the disciples then and to us today, “You’re not going to be left alone, you’re not going to be orphaned. And not only are you not going to be alone, what you’re going to have is the spiritual presence of the Son of God with you always. And that presence is the love that Jesus demonstrated in the flesh toward those who were ostracized, suffering, and without hope.”

That’s what we, too, find through the presence of the Advocate, the Spirit.

Singer Gillian Welch wrote a song about an orphan, titled “Orphan Girl.” It is about a young woman who has been left alone, with no father, mother, sister, or brother. She’s troubled by this and longs for the day when she will be with them again and will no longer be an orphan girl. Yet,

amidst her pain, she is able to say, "Blessed savior, make me willing and walk beside me until I am with them."

The Holy Spirit walks beside us as Jesus' presence to guarantee that we are not alone. As Psalm 27 says, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will sustain me."

We are not left orphaned and hopeless but are comforted and given hope by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "You will realize that you are in me and I am in you." We are not orphaned, we are not alone, through the presence of the spirit of the living God.

This September will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9-11. Hard to believe that tragedy is now a quarter century old.

There are so many stories of both loss and heroism that came from that day that they can fill a lifetime of our collective memories. One of those stories I had not heard until recently involved, not surprisingly, the New York City Fire Department.

Lee Ielpi is a retired New York City firefighter. He gave 26 years to the city. But on September 11, 2001, he gave much more. He gave his son. Jonathan Ielpi was a fireman as well. When the Twin Towers fell, he was there.

Firefighters are a loyal clan. When one perishes in the line of duty, the body is left where it is until a firefighter who knows the person can come and quite literally pick it up. Lee made the discovery of his son's body after the tragedy his personal mission. He dug daily with dozens of others at the 16-acre graveyard that was the World Trade Center. On Tuesday, December 11, three months after the disaster, his son was found. And Lee was there to carry him out.

He didn't give up. The father didn't quit. He refused to turn and leave. Why? Because his love for his son was greater than the pain of the search.

Lee Ielpi was not going to abandon his son, was not going to leave his body orphaned. And he worked tirelessly to do so.

And that's the image I have of so many other paracletes or paracletos (advocates who come alongside someone in danger of being abandoned): foster parents like my wife, Laura, was. She rescued abandoned twin baby girls out of the NICU fourteen years ago and cared for them, and then later adopted them. They weren't going to be and haven't been alone since.

There's also dedicated teachers that never give up on troubled students, who go beyond the call of duty to make sure a young man or woman finds their way academically.

This is the same kind of tireless work God does for all of us—making sure we are not alone, not giving up on us.

Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit. For friends who become separated due to life's circumstances, for victims who see family members suffer and die unnecessarily, for communities of people who struggle to find justice and peace in their lives, no, they are not alone either. The one who will not leave us orphaned is by our sides to bring comfort and strength.

For the abiding presence of a compassionate and loving God through a compassionate counselor, advocate, companion, and friend who never quits on us, we offer our praise and thanks today. Amen.