

“Blessed be God who has not removed
God’s love from us.” AMEN!

There’s an ancient story about a farmer and his horse.

One day the horse broke loose from its corral and ran off.

The neighbors came by to express their condolences.

“What bad luck,” they said.
The farmer replied, “Maybe.”

The next day that horse returned and
brought with it a collection of wild horses.

“What good luck,” the neighbors said.
The farmer said, “Maybe.”

The farmer’s son went to work on
training one of them and was thrown and
the son broke his leg.

The neighbors said, “What bad luck.”
The farmer replied, “Maybe.”

A week later, officials from the military came
to the man’s farm looking for young men to be sent
to a distant war.

They passed over the man's son because
he had the broken leg.

"What good luck," the neighbors said, and
again the farmer replied, "Maybe." (Pause)

What the farmer knew, before the neighbors,
was that single events are difficult to label as
entirely good or totally bad because

the farmer recognized he does not know
the ways single events will play out in life.

This is an important lesson.

The other is that there is always
something that comes next.

This lesson of "something coming next" is
the key to Jesus words in our gospel
lesson today from John.

The feet of the disciples have been washed and
the bread has been broken, wine poured, and
a new commandment to love one another
the way Christ loves them, has been given.

Jesus knew what was coming next and he even knew
that those closest to him would scatter
in his time of need.

He knew they'd behave like children and
protect themselves while Jesus died on
the cross abandoned and desolate.

Yet, even in the midst of knowing those things,
Jesus spoke to them with loving instruction.

Jesus, like the farmer in the wisdom story,
knows that these events cannot clearly be labeled
so he continued to teach.

We, like the neighbors expressing each
event as "good" or "bad,"
do not know what will come next,
how the story of our lives will play out.

It doesn't mean we don't do anything.

The farmer continued to plant his fields and care
for the injured son.

It does mean that we recognize what
we can control and what we cannot control.

We can control our actions and thoughts, but
we cannot control what others think or do.

We can control our responses to joys and sorrows,
but we cannot control the way other people
respond to joys and sorrows. (Pause)

It is like looking through an old photo album.

There are the happy baby pictures,
pictures from elementary school and
photos of prom dates and other
big life events.

Loved ones that are no longer alive.

The memories flood into the mind, and those
memories may bring about thoughts or
questions about decisions made during
that time of life.

Some we might say were good and some
we might say were bad.

Times when I behaved immature or childish were bad
and the times when I achieved something or
reminded of something positive was good.

When we are not aware, we almost always
dwell on the bad. (Pause)

Today, let us be reminded that
these thoughts do not need to be dwelled on.

They are simply thoughts which can
be recognized and then released.

They do not have any hold on us unless

we allow them to have a hold on us.

Jesus reminds us that something comes next;
a page will be turned and a new life is
around the corner, and

we are aware that there will be valleys, too.

Tough times and hardships and grief
fall on all people. (Pause)

This awareness is what makes John's telling of
Jesus in the upper room most poignant.

As he gave instructions to his closest followers
we overhear him directing us to continue our
active forms of love, too.

It was probably easier for them when Jesus was around,
but how will they embody God's love in the world
when Jesus is not with them?

"Bad luck," they must have thought.
"Maybe," Jesus might say. :-)

The something that comes next is the Holy Spirit.

How do we see it?

More importantly, how do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Jesus' answer is to love.

Not the sentimental kind but the active kind.

The kind that reminds us (and all people) that
they're never left orphaned. (Pause)

Pastor Dean Lueking tells it this way,

"You're in your late 80's and living in the house
that had been your home for over 50 years.

Gently, you nod off during the evening news
with a half-eaten plate of dinner
next to your easy chair.

You awaken with an audible sigh. (sigh!)

Life alone in the house is beginning
to be too much responsibility and
it can get lonely there.

Yet, that feeling is not the only thing or
even the main thing.

For you know what spiritual presence is,
as your eye wanders from the news
to the mantle with the photographs there...

memories, smiles, pets, children, grandchildren...

then in the center is the one whom you've
loved for over 60 years.

The sigh escapes again, (sigh)
but not because you're desolate or orphaned.

No...

This is a sigh of hope and assurance.

A breath that reminds you of the Holy Spirit,
the promise from Jesus that's with you forever.

You are not orphaned, you are not abandoned. (Pause)

Beloved, the gospel today reminds us that
no matter what our age,
we are children of the living God.

It is not always obvious for us to see and words,
they almost always fail to define,

but a sigh, a feeling, a tear,
a remembered promise somehow breaks through
and we know love never dies and
therefore we are never left alone.

AMEN!