

EASTER VI ~ YEAR A John 14.15-21
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St. John the Evangelist, Smiths Falls ~ May 17, 2020

Last week, I preached about Stephen, that first Christian martyr. I didn't talk about Jesus at the last supper, uttering those words familiar to us from funerals, "*Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me...*" I didn't preach about Thomas and Philip asking, challenging, pushing Jesus for an explanation about this business of him having to leave, having to go. I didn't preach about the tone of lament in the Gospel, about the impending sense of loss the disciples were facing into which Jesus was trying to speak.

Today's Gospel passage picks up where last week's left off. We are back in the upper room. We are back with Jesus on the night of his arrest. Here on the sixth Sunday of the great 50 days of Easter, we are back in the darkness of night, the threat of violence in the air. And we hear Jesus' words of assurance in the midst of the fear and uncertainty faced by his followers.

It's a powerful promise made to disciples who were afraid and uncertain about the future nearly two thousand years ago. It's a powerful promise made to disciples who are afraid and uncertain about the future today.

Knowing that his disciples were going to feel abandoned, alone, "orphaned", Jesus promised to send them an "Advocate". In the Greek, the word is *Parakletos*. We know it as the Spirit, but it literally means one who comes alongside you, who pleads your case; who takes your side.

We might think at first the Spirit's role as advocating for us, interceding for us with God. Paul writes as much in his letter to the Romans. But, if Jesus was speaking into the sense of loss and uncertainty his disciples were going to experience, if he was promising an advocate to his disciples who would feel abandoned, alone, orphaned, perhaps the this advocate, the Spirit, would be one interceding on God's behalf with them. Perhaps the Spirit is the one who comes to remind us of our identity as children of God, as sheep who recognize the voice of our shepherd, those for whom the good shepherd lays down his life.

We know, and God knows, that image, of children beloved of God and beloved by God can be a hard image to hold onto, a hard identity to believe is really ours, especially when we are stressed or frightened, unsure about our future; when it feels like everything has been turned upside down.

This gift of the Spirit, this gift of the Advocate who reminds us of our identity and God's love and care even in the midst of fear, uncertainty and chaos, creates the possibility that **we** can then do the same thing for others. This spirit invites us to be a legion of advocates helping, comforting, encouraging, counseling, and lifting up others as they face fear, uncertainty and chaos.

Part of the evidence of the Spirit's ongoing presence and power among us is that these kinds of things are already happening. We live during a frightening time. There is no doubt that we are surrounded by feelings of loss: loss of income; loss of connection; loss of life. We perch on the edge of our seats waiting for a sense of security, a sense of "recovery" and we wonder if things will ever be okay again. How much longer, Jesus? How much longer do we have to be separate from the ones we love? How much longer before we can experience human touch? Human connection? Financial security? Freedom of movement? When can we gather again together in worship? In the Holy Eucharist? To celebrate as the Body of Christ together? To mourn and celebrate the lives of those who have died and to rejoice when new life is born? How long Jesus?

We are living in a time of fear, uncertainty and chaos. But we are also living in a time of poignant sacrifice, extravagant generosity, encouragement, unity and compassion. We are inheritors of this Spirit, this Advocate Jesus promised and sent, commissioned to do "Spirit work," in our own lives and in the world in this time and in this place.

Lament, promise, encouragement, effort, advocacy. These all constitute much of the rhythm of our lives as God's people – as Jesus' present-day disciples – in the world. We undertake none of it alone, because Jesus has promised us nothing less than the Paraclete, the very Spirit of truth who reminds us of Jesus' promises and presence.