

John 14:15-21

Sixth Sunday of Easter

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Good Morning Church. It's the sixth Sunday of the Easter season, May 17, 2020. I'm not sure about you, but I need an hourly reminder of what day it is these days. Haha! Time is blurred, and it seems all of the information we get is changing minute by minute.

But don't worry, I am here to keep us on track liturgically. (That was a bit of sarcasm if you didn't catch it.) The truth is, we are approaching the end of this celebratory Easter time together, and this year, most of it didn't even feel very celebratory. No big Easter gatherings in our church buildings, no family Easter egg hunts with the grandchildren, no Mother's Day luncheons, probably no Memorial Day festivities... and we have no idea when those things will resume.

And though many events have been cancelled and life has slowed down tremendously, it feels like I've lived a few lifetimes during this pandemic. I don't know about you all, but even though we've only been worshipping digitally for two months now, the beginning of Lent and our last corporate worship together feels like a different time. It really *was* a different time. I find myself longing for my old life – the one where Mo and I could take the kids to a movie or to sit in a restaurant to eat – and I *know* y'all are missing some things too.

One of the more serious things we are missing right now has to do with the people we've lost due to this pandemic. Some of us worshipping here today have lost people we know and love during this time. But for many of us, the deaths from COVID-19 haven't hit home directly.

Still, in some places in Michigan, our siblings in Christ are calling out for help and support during this time. Let's take a closer look at our gospel lesson before we bring this discussion back to present day.

In our text today, just like last week, we find Jesus once again preparing the disciples for his death. Jesus tells the disciples the way they will show that they love him is by keeping his commandments. If we remember from earlier in John, the disciples received a new commandment from Jesus. John 13:34 says "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

Got it, loving one another is easy right? Okay, if you didn't pick up my sarcasm earlier please pick up on it here. Love is not just a feeling; it is an act. And loving people through our actions is one of the *hardest* things in the world to do.

After Jesus tells the disciples to keep his commandments, he says in verse 16, "16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

Now, as Christians trained in Trinitarian theology we are at an advantage. We confess an understanding in the mystery of God in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Or if you read my latest blog post on the Trinitarian Mystery, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

We've been taught about the Holy Spirit, this advocate, and in fact in two weeks we will talk about the Spirit in depth as we celebrate the Day of Pentecost. But for the disciples, they really *didn't have a clue* what Jesus was talking about. Their savior, their God, wasn't tangible until Jesus came along. With Jesus leaving, could they picture what a personal relationship with God was going to be like moving forward?

And what did Jesus mean when he said he was sending *another advocate* to be with them forever? It must mean that 1. Jesus was also an advocate, and 2. If this being was meant to be with them forever it couldn't be another human... right? Because humans perish. Every incarnate thing will die.

But *this* advocate was going to abide not only with them but *in* them forever. What did that mean to the disciples? Luckily Jesus didn't leave them alone to figure it out. He comes back after the resurrection to remain with them until the advocate comes. This act of abiding with the disciples again until the advocate comes is what we in church world call accompaniment. Overcoming death, in other words the Resurrection, is not the ultimate goal for God or for us as Christians. NO, the ultimate goal is accompaniment, it's journeying with our God and our God journeying with and in us, just like Jesus journeyed with the disciples.

And just like Jesus, who journeyed through Palestine healing blind men, feeding hungry people, and including the marginalized like the Samaritan woman at the well, and just like Jesus, *this* advocate was going to help the disciples to do what Jesus helped them do. *This* advocate was going to help them live out the greatest commandments of loving God and loving one another.

This advocate that gave the disciples the power and support to love one another *also* gives us the power and support to love one another, even when it is hard. I said before that love is not a feeling but an action, right?

And right now there are people crying out for us to act during this global pandemic. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on communities of color in places like Detroit and Flint. Though Black people make up only about 16% of Michigan's population, they make up 43% of deaths from COVID-19. This is due to racism in all of its many forms.

Our synod has asked us to prayerfully consider how we may stand in support and solidarity with the communities that have been hardest hit by the coronavirus. This also includes us able-bodied folks standing in solidarity with those in our own communities who are more vulnerable. By the grace of God and with the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to pray and receive guidance for this request from our siblings in Christ.

On Wednesday May 27th at 7PM I, along with other faith leaders in this synod, will be hosting an online event in which we will dive deeper into the issues of race and COVID 19 in Michigan.

Every one of you is invited to attend, and I will be sending more information about this Zoom meeting later this week.

So, people of St. Mark, I want you to hear this good news. God the Holy Spirit dwells among us. That is a promise from God, and God's promises are true.

And this Spirit advocates for the most vulnerable among us, just like Jesus advocated for the most vulnerable in his society. The Spirit gives us support and courage as we *choose* to act out our love for our hurting siblings. Please join me in learning more about structural, institutional, and environmental racism on May 27th. Join me in brainstorming ways to stand in solidarity with God's beloved. God may not need our good works, but our neighbors do. And they are asking for our support. Will we answer the call?