

Gospel

John 14:15-21

Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

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"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

The disciples are very anxious every time Jesus talks about his imminent departure from them. The passage we just heard comes in the midst of Jesus last supper with his friends and he is trying to encourage them and tell them the truth at the same time. The disciples don't say much in this long speech from Jesus. I think that they are dumbfounded and they wish that Jesus would stop talking about his death. I imagine that the experience is a bit like sitting down to dinner with a family member and discovering that all they want to tell you about is the plans for their death and funeral. It is an important conversation to have, but most of us avoid this conversation, usually until it is too late.

The disciples cannot understand why Jesus believes that his death is so inevitable. He is not sick. If he is worried about the Roman guards, he can go into hiding or they can fight to defend him. Jesus seems to be walking right into death without even a struggle and the disciples are not sure what to make of it. What they can't imagine is that Jesus' death will make him look like a criminal, guilty of treason and blasphemy. This holy man, their Rabbi, who is so full of truth and goodness and healing and miracles. This man who is so close to God will be degraded and humiliated before the world.

But Jesus knows that this is going to happen. Jesus also knows that it will become very difficult for his disciples to maintain their faith in him after he is dead and gone. They will begin to doubt. They will begin to wander back to their old lives of fishing for fish, and they will forget about fishing for people. So Jesus encourages them, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul. And Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Notice, Jesus does not say, "If you keep my commandments, I will love you." His love is unconditional. He loves us no matter what we do, even if we forget about him and go back to fishing. Jesus is trying to tell us that the best way to show our love for him, after he is gone, is by loving God and loving our neighbor. It is a simple formula, really. After 2000 years of trying to keep Jesus commandments, we often talk about looking for the Christ in everyone. Seeing the face of Christ in every person, whether they are friend or stranger. When we love our neighbors we are, in effect, loving Jesus.

Then Jesus tells the disciples about "the Advocate" who God will send to be with them forever. The Greek word here is literally translated as counselor or attorney. John's Gospel describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth who will argue Jesus' case and prove that he was unjustly condemned to death and

crucified. This is the Holy Spirit. Jesus is introducing the disciples and us to the third person of the trinity. Even though Jesus will die, be resurrected, and ascend into heaven, the Holy Spirit – God’s very spirit- will never leave them. In fact, the Holy Spirit will help the disciples as they waver and wander in their faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit will assist them in keeping Jesus commandments. The Holy Spirit will fill them up and inspire them to share the gospel, even though their own lives might be on the line.

The Holy Spirit is often the least understood member of the trinity. The Holy Spirit has been hovering over creation since the moment God called it all into being. But the Holy Spirit is not a person, not tangible, we are not able to pin her down. Sometimes in scripture, she is called Holy Wisdom, or to use the Greek, Sophia. The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the wisdom of God, even when it is the opposite of the wisdom of humanity.

I never really had a relationship with the Holy Spirit until a friend of mine introduced me to her. I noticed one day that every once in awhile, during worship, my friend would reach up with her hand and pat her own shoulder. She always had a blissful smile on her face, so I knew she was not in pain and massaging a sore muscle. One day I asked her about it and she said, “Oh, when I feel the Holy Spirit hovering over us, you know I feel her presence in the music or the words or just the silence, I reach up and pat her on my shoulder to say thank you for being there and for pulling back the curtain a bit so I can experience the kingdom of God.”

After that, I began to pay attention to those moments when the Holy Spirit was hovering close. They were moments when I felt a burst of loving-energy, or maybe a peace that passes all understanding. Or sometimes, she brings the piercing truth of God’s wisdom and it cuts through all our human fumbling. Or sometimes, the Holy Spirit gives us the courage to do God’s will even when it is unpopular and very difficult. It is the Holy Spirit that we invoke when we ask God to change the communion elements of bread and wine into body and blood. The Holy Spirit inspires us to be church: to gather together, to share the Gospel, and to keep Jesus commandments.

Today we are going to gather together in our annual meeting. Sometimes, when we hear the word “meeting”, our eyes glaze over and we are prepared for something uninspiring. This might happen at some meetings in our lives, but not today. The Holy Spirit will be hovering over us. It is the same Spirit that God sent to help the first apostles begin the church. The Holy Spirit will guide us in all truth. The Holy Spirit will inspire us to find the boundless energy and the profound peace and follow these paths of ministry. The Holy Spirit will feed us, sustain us, and give us courage for the year ahead.

As we gather together to review the past year, to do some business, and to dream about the year to come, reach up and pat your shoulder because the Holy Spirit is with us, forever leading us closer to God’s will for us and for all creation.