

Sermon for May 17, 2020

In this week Gospel lesson, John is giving us an introduction into the Holy Spirit. We are just two weeks away now from the holy day of Pentecost, the day when the disciples encounter the Holy Spirit. Leading up to that day, this week and I believe next week, we will be hearing more about the Holy Spirit and what they do in the life of the Church as the third part of the Trinity. Today, Jesus describes the role of the Holy Spirit as a companion, a guide, an advocate for us. I will not leave you orphaned. I will send you a companion. Some translations translate Paraclete, the word used for the Holy Spirit here, as an Advocate. I like both terms to describe the role of the Holy Spirit. An Advocate is someone who works with you and fights on your behalf. A companion is someone who walks with you and stays with you on your journey. Either word describes, in my mind, perfectly what the Holy Spirit does on our behalf.

This passage from John's Gospel comes during what Biblical Scholars call Jesus' Farewell Discourse. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death and, ultimately his resurrection and ascension.

"I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

This passage reminds us what it means for us to be disciples of Christ, especially in the 21st century. We are not alone during this time. We are cared for and loved. And we have an obligation to care for and love each other, to fulfill the commandments Jesus taught us: love God and love your neighbor. We are not alone in this time.

The disciples needed to hear that what they worked for and fought for and struggled to obtain was not in vain. Suddenly their leader is telling them that he is about to die and leave them. They were worried and afraid and confused. Their hopes of a conquest of Rome were being dashed. Their hopes of a restored Israelite kingdom were being dashed. What do you mean, Jesus, that you are about to die and three days later, you'll be

raised? That is the preface to this passage this morning. Jesus promises them that even though he may die shortly, they should not worry because they will have an Advocate, a Companion, who will guide them on their journey ahead. They will be left orphaned, alone, leaderless. Their mission and ministry for the last three years was not in vain. Their mission and ministry is just about to begin. Jesus tells them, “You will not be left alone, dear disciples.”

We are not alone in this time. I don’t know about you, but I need to hear this promise again and again during this pandemic times. In this time of increased and heightened isolation, where we are told we have to keep social distance from one another, weighs heavily upon us. We are anxious and worried and scared. We don’t know what is going to happen in the future. Many of us are grieving. Friends of mine have lost loved ones to Covid-19. I miss my family and friends. Yes, in some ways, this Covid 19 social isolation has brought us together in ways our previous generations could never experience. I have been able to connect with family and friends from all over the country weekly on zoom. I get to see their faces and interact with them: from the East Coast to the West Coast, from the North and the South. And yet, we are further apart now, more than ever before. In this time of social distancing and isolation, I need to hear from Scriptures the promise that I am not alone, I am not orphaned. God has not abandoned me and us in this time. We have a companion, an Advocate, caring for us, fighting for us, loving us along the way. No, we are not alone during this time.

And that is the message that we need to be sharing with the world right now, dear disciples. Now is precisely the time for the Church to be stepping up and taking charge and sharing the love and fulfilling the Commandments that Christ has given us. Now is not a holiday or a break for the Church. Our Church doors might be closed, but the Church of Jesus Christ is still very much open for business. We have much work to be doing in our community. We can take out our full pantries with some of that extra food we bought two months ago and haven’t used yet and probably don’t need. We can volunteer at the food pantry. We can support our local businesses. We can stay home and when we go out, we can wear a mask to protect each other. We can put our trust in the Lord

that we are not alone in this time. In times of panic and anxiety, we tend to become insulated and isolated. We hoard stuff out of fear. And I'm not pointing fingers at anyone but myself here. But now is the time for the Church of Jesus Christ to act. When this is all said and done, believe me, people are going to be asking, "Where was First Presbyterian Church in Farmington, IL during this pandemic?" Where were our churches in this pandemic? And I know what answer I want to be. We were in the streets helping people and caring for people in this time. We were showing the love of Christ to our community. We put our faith in and trust in the guiding hands of the Holy Spirit and we fulfilled Christ's commands to love God and love our neighbors. Now is the time to put our trust and hopes in Jesus Christ. Now is time to take the leap of faith and trust that the Holy Spirit is guiding us. We are not alone. Amen.