

**The Church of the Good Shepherd**  
The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza  
Th Seventh Sunday of Easter – June 2, 2019  
John 17:20-26

*O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear, and kindle it thy holy flame bestowing; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Recently, I've been thinking about goodbyes. Whether they are "goodbye until I see you later today", "goodbye until our paths cross again," or "goodbye, it has been a pleasure knowing you – I wish you a good life," no matter the context of the goodbye, we often struggle with it. I don't know what it is about goodbyes that make them complicated.

We probably say "goodbye" numerous times a day. If we know we will see each other again soon, these partings are not usually difficult or painful. We are separating, yes, but we are comforted that we will be reunited soon. There are exceptions to this, of course. As any parent of a young child experiencing separation anxiety knows, sometimes even the briefest of partings can be traumatic.

One of the reasons the toddler is devastated at mom or dad's leave-taking is that she doesn't yet understand that this separation is only temporary. For her, she's begun to realize that there is only one of you, and that when she can't see you, it means you've gone away. She also doesn't understand the concept of time so she does not know if or when you'll come back. In this situation, the "goodbye" feels permanent. When there is only the now, even temporary leave-taking becomes "never again."

This came to mind as I studied for our Gospel lesson today. This lesson continues the readings from Jesus' farewell discourse and prayer, in which he addresses his disciples at the conclusion of the Last Supper and just before his going to the garden of Gethsemane which will begin the journey his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. This discourse is really quite lengthy, spanning four chapters in John's gospel.

In his farewell discourse, Jesus explains that he is "going to the father" (14:28) in reference to his journey to the cross, the victory of resurrection, and his ascension into heaven to be with the Father. But before his time comes, Jesus gives his disciples words of assurance and the promise of his continuing presence.

I can imagine the scene. The disciples are still puzzling over the whole foot washing thing; still marveling over this new covenant Jesus has made with them in his body and blood; still wondering whether they were capable of keeping his great commandment of loving others as they had been loved by Jesus. And now, Jesus announces that he is leaving them to return to the one he calls the Father, the One who sent him. "Wait...what?!" they must be thinking. "But we love you....you can't go! What about us?... How can you leave us? What will we do without you?" Yes, I am leaving, Jesus tells them, but "do not let your hearts be troubled.... I will not leave you orphaned." (14:1, 18) Like a loving parent to a toddler who is distraught at the idea of their separation, Jesus comforts his beloved disciples by promising *that they will be left in good and caring hands; that that this parting is not forever; and he loves them.* Jesus also gives his disciples three special gifts to strengthen and encourage them in the times ahead.

**The first gift.**

Jesus promises that his departure will bring a new presence to those who love him. He says, "I have said these things to you while I am with you, but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (14:25-26) Also known in the Gospel of John as the Paraclete and "the Spirit of Truth", the Holy Spirit will be a teaching and guiding presence within the community of the faithful, whose

primary purpose is to help Jesus' followers re-member Jesus and his teachings.

In this way, the Holy Spirit is our Advocate, Helper, Companion, and Comforter, and functions to link past and future. The Holy Spirit reminds us who Jesus is and makes Jesus real to us here and now, bringing Jesus' actions into the present. In doing so, the Spirit is a continuation, and also an expansion, of Jesus' ministry and teaching. The Holy Spirit will be an abiding presence in and among the community of the faithful, guiding them into the future

### **The second gift.**

Jesus promises that the separation is not permanent. Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (14:23) Jesus explains that all the disciples must do is love him and follow his way, and in doing so, they will know and experience the abiding presence of the Father and the Son in their lives. Jesus may not be with us on Earth as he once was, but the disciples can remain in loving relationship with him by doing his works and by keeping his word.

This gift is given to us through our *faithful action*. When we engage in the life of Jesus – when we live what Jesus has taught and demonstrated in his own life – we will find ourselves abiding in his love and experience the divine indwelling presence. One theologian writes, "The route to knowing God is to live the word of Jesus, which in turn will, with the Spirit's aid, lead to a living experience of the love of Jesus and the one who sent him."<sup>1</sup>

### **The third Gift.**

Jesus again shares his great love for the disciples by sharing with them his peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (14:27) This peace will be a comfort in the difficult times ahead and will be a salve for their frightened, troubled hearts.

However, it is a different sort of peace than the world offers. As New Testament scholar Robert Kysar notes, "it is a peculiar peace Jesus gives." Kysar explains that the peace most of us wish for is usually a peace of absence – absence of struggle; absence of sorrow; absence of difficulty. But the peace Jesus gives is not that at all. According to Kysar, "The peace Jesus gives is a result of the presence of God in the Spirit, not the absence of other things...not the absence of the struggles of life. His peace is a divine presence that does not annihilate the unpleasantness of life but empowers one to live with the unpleasantness."<sup>2</sup>

Now, I have to admit that I'm not sure this is the peace I desire. The peace I usually seek is the peace of the world. But the peace of Jesus helps us to live in the present reality, in the eternal now, which is the only place that we may find God. We need this gift of peace so that we may be present enough to know the presence of God within the world and within us. And when we know this peace we are able to live with untroubled and fearless hearts.

Today's text is from the concluding prayer that forms the culmination of Jesus' farewell discourse. Jesus prays that through the holy work of the Spirit, the Advocate, which will forever bind them to him, they will be given the last and greatest gift of all: full communion with God through life lived "in" Christ.

This "being in Jesus" is John's way of describing a state of communion that is essential for our faith because it leads us to being in communion with others. As one writer put it in her meditation on this lesson, "If we love God and if we are communing with God, then this will lead us to loving and communing with our brothers and sisters. If we love God and are communing with

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<sup>1</sup> Carman, Peter J.B.; *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 2*; 2008, Westminster John Knox Press. p.496

<sup>2</sup> Kysar, Robert; *Preaching John*; 2002, Fortress Press. p. 108.

God then we will find God in one another.”<sup>3</sup> In doing so, this will be our greatest witness to the world that Christ’s Spirit is alive and working among us, even as he has returned to the Father.

There used to be a daily short program on public radio called *The Writer’s Almanac* which shared poetry and literary historical interest pieces. At the end of every episode of *The Writer’s Almanac*, the host signed off with the words, “**Be Well. Do good work. Stay in touch.**” What a great goodbye! I think, too, this good bye encapsulates Jesus’ farewell discourses nicely.

**Be well:** Jesus gives us his peace to comfort and strengthen us to live and work as he did.

**Do good work:** Through the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus calls us to continue his work and ministry in the world and to reveal God’s love through our lives and actions.

And, **Stay in touch:** If we love Jesus and follow his path, he and the Father will abide in our hearts through the Spirit. Through this, we will be united with God and know ourselves as His beloved.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ott, Teri McDowell. (<https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/sundays-coming/communion-christ-and-others-john-1720-26>)