

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, May 22, 2022

6th Sunday of Easter/Year C

First Reading: Acts 16:9-15

Second Reading: Revelation 21:10,22—22:5

Gospel Reading: John 14:23-29

Sermon Title: “*Living Out the Love of the Lord*”

Theme

As Jesus talks of returning to the Father, he promises to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach Jesus’ followers and remind them of all that Jesus taught. Even more, those in whom God makes a home will experience a peace that overcomes fear.

Text

²³Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot),] “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. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But 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. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

Sermon

The context for today's Gospel Reading, like last week's Gospel Reading, is the Last Supper. It was what we now call Holy Thursday, the last night, last Passover, last meal, and last interaction that Jesus had with his twelve disciples before he is betrayed, beaten nearly to death, put on trial, and crucified. One point of clarification: Judas Iscariot left the gathering to do his dirty deed in 13:30

Jesus knew the time had come and so he had been preparing his disciples for some time, but as far as Holy Thursday went, he had been in this long discourse for nearly two chapters. He told them that he was going away to a place that they could not yet follow. He spoke of his own death and warned them about difficult times ahead for them, but as we can imagine, they really did not understand what he meant. Thus, what ought to have been a joyous Passover meal had become a somber last supper, a mournful last meal, before a terrible departure.

But wait already, aren't we still in the season of Easter? How can we be talking about his pending death when we aren't done celebrating his resurrection? My answer is, yes, we are still in the season of Easter, but we are also preparing for the festival of Pentecost which we will celebrate on June 5th and so the reason we find ourselves back in time is that Jesus was setting the stage not only for his leaving but also for the coming of another. As Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure from them, he told them that he will not leave them comfortless, will not leave them alone, and will not leave them to their own devices.

He didn't say to them, "I'm going to leave you, but I want you to think hard and try to remember everything I've ever taught you. Each morning, get up and go over the words of my Sermon on the Mount, word for word, so you won't forget it, so you'll have all my teaching at your fingertips when you need it."

He doesn't tell them, "John, now I want you to get busy and write a book. Call it the Gospel According to John. That way, everyone will have all my words, just like I spoke them to you. Anytime you are in trouble, having some difficulty, or wanting to know my take on any given situation, you can just open that book, turn to the right verse, and it'll be just like I'm still with you. You can look it up!"

He doesn't tell them, "Now I'm going to appoint Peter as disciple number one. John, you can be disciple number two. The rest of you will need to submit to and obediently follow number one and number two. They're in charge when I leave. Anytime you have some tough question, just go ask number one and he will make a ruling on the matter."

Jesus said none of this as his disciples look on, downtrodden over the tone of his talk. What he told them is that he was not going to leave them alone. He was leaving, but he will give them the paracletos. He promises them the gift of the paracletos. Have you ever met the paracletos? I think you have.

παρακλητος – "one called alongside"

παρακλητος ⇔ *paracletos* ⇔ *paraclete* ⇔ *Advocate* ⇔ *counselor, advocate, comforter, instructor, helper,*

In Greek, *paracletos* means literally "one called alongside." So the Paraclete is one called alongside Jesus' followers. It can have a variety of meanings, and different translations of this passage from the Gospel of John translate it into English as "counselor," "advocate," "comforter," or "instructor." And there is something to be said for any of those translations. Jesus promised them another, one who is called to walk alongside his followers wherever they go from that place, the Paraclete. In this passage, "Advocate," Paraclete is capitalized because it is a proper name of someone, or perhaps something. Jesus said:

- "I'm leaving you, but you shouldn't feel like orphans.
- I'm going to send you my friend, my presence, Paraclete.
- It will remind you of all that I have tried to teach you while I've been with you.
- It will explain it all to you.
- It is called to walk beside you and to continue to teach you."

Jesus was indeed departing. And on his departure, he promised the gift of the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

My inlaws have been on my mind lately. Many years ago my inlaws took the whole family to Hawaii. Hawaii is a fabulous place to go. But there is so much to

see and do that if you plan to go you should get help making wise choices. There are sights and activities that you will see advertised that you would think, “I absolutely have to see that!” Take the Don Ho show. Don Ho was an icon of Hawaii. Remember "Tiny Bubbles" If you go to Hawaii you have to go see his show, right? I’ve seen it, take my word for it, you do not need to see the Don Ho show. And by the way, he died in 2007. On the other hand, if you are physically up to it, the bike ride down Mt. Haliakula is worth the trip.

Even once you are there and have made wise choices, there are some sights you simply need a guide to get through. There is a place on Oahu called the Polynesian Cultural Center. Yes, it is a tourist trap extraordinaire, but there is no other place like it in the world and you must experience it to begin to understand Polynesian culture. But the place is so big and busy, that if you went through it and tried to read every sign and see every show and artifact, you would never get through it. Therefore they provide guides, at a cost, to lead you through the best exhibits.

That’s what Jesus promised his disciples – a guide. And that promise is for everyone who calls him Lord.

We are in the season of Easter. Wasn’t it wonderful to be here on Easter Sunday with the music, the crowd, and the strong sense of Christ’s presence, the fragrance of the lilies and tulips and hyacinths? It’s easy to say, after the Easter Sunday service, “I believe! I got it!”

But what about six Sundays after Easter? The lilies and the tulips have all wilted. Many of our members that made their first appearance in perhaps two years have settled back into their usual patterns of worship. But in today's Gospel Reading, the celebration of Christ’s resurrection seems to be tempered by his pending absence? What then?

Then, promises today’s Gospel, there is the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit walks beside us, with us, teaching us. There are lots of good things that the Holy Spirit, this Paraclete, gives us, but note today that what’s particularly promised here is that the Paraclete will “remind” us (v. 26). Some of the best education is that of reminding. A great deal of education is not putting into our brains something that we previously did not know, but also reminding us of what we already knew. When we say, “I got it!” sometimes what we mean is, “Now, I remember!”

You have experienced, I expect, the work of the Paraclete in your life. There are those moments, wonderful as they are, when you are reading a passage of scripture, perhaps a passage that you have scanned a dozen times before. And then, while reading, something in the text jumps out at you, shakes you, grabs you as never before. You say to yourself, “I’ve read this passage a dozen times and never saw that before.” But maybe you have seen it before. Maybe what you mean is, “Now I remember what this means, but it is as if I am seeing it for the first time.” That’s the Paraclete walking beside you.

Or think about those disciples listening to Jesus that night. I imagine they feared what might come next for them. But through the Holy Spirit, they did remember their Lord's teachings and wrote them down. In those early days, there were some personality clashes and hurt feelings, but as they got over their human insecurities and entered into the leadership of the Holy Spirit, there was order for the sake of the Gospel.

Or you go through a tough time in your life. For days you have been in a dark, deserted valley. You have not known which way to turn. In your pain, you have asked questions like, “Where is God?” “Does God care about me?”

Then, perhaps here in worship, through the music, or the scripture, or even the sermon, you have said, “Yes, now I remember. God loves me. God is not far from me! I can go on!” You could have truthfully said, “Now I remember! For a while, due to my troubles, I almost forgot. But now I remember, I am a child of God, precious to God, held by God in a loving embrace.” Thank God that Jesus has called the Paraclete to walk alongside us.

Think of Sunday worship, at its best, as the extended work of the Paraclete. We get dressed, we come here to church, on the Sundays after Easter, to remember, to recall, to re-collect the risen Christ. Life being what it is, there are so many occasions when we forget what we already know from Easter – that Jesus Christ is Lord, that Christ has risen, he has risen indeed. So we gather here on Sunday, we sing the hymns, we listen to the Word read and proclaimed, and we count on the Paraclete to remind us.

“I will not leave you as orphans!” said Jesus. To stand with us, speak to us, teach us, remind us, he has sent us the Counselor, Advocate, Comforter, the Paraclete. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, come to us, walk beside us, stand with us, remind us. Call to our minds the words and work of Jesus. Remind us of his teaching. Remind us to put his teaching into practice in our daily lives. By your presence, show us that we do not walk alone, that we are not left to our own devices when it comes to discipleship. Holy Spirit, breathe upon us, empower us, remind us so that we might be the disciples that Jesus deserves. Amen.