

“The Advocate”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday May 24, 2020

John 14:15-24

Frederick Buechner complains that in our day the word “spirit” has come to mean something pale and shapeless, like an unmade bed.

I hope that you will, when you hear the words Holy Spirit, first think of the powerful Spirit of God, that is like the power of a storm, that is dynamic and moving.

Sometimes the movement of the Spirit of God is soft and gentle, subtle and almost imperceptible, like a gentle summer breeze, warm upon your cheek, playful with the flower petals.

But at other times the wind is a strong force, able to uproot trees, and bring down buildings. The Holy Spirit, the power of God, is the breath of life in each person, and is the life of the church.

The Holy Spirit can be a powerful force in the life of believers and in the church, it can sweep house, and clean out the cobwebs, it can uproot sin, and be a powerful force that directs and empowers believers.

The Holy Spirit is the life of believers and the church.
Without the Holy Spirit at work in us we have no life.

Our passage from John's gospel is the continuation of Jesus' words that we read last week.

Jesus began; “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Sometimes we get fooled into thinking that love is just a happy feeling.
But loving Jesus equals keeping his commandments, following in his ways, doing life his way.

*“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.”*

The Advocate, is also called a Helper, a Counsellor, or Comforter.
It is **another** Advocate.

Jesus has been the Advocate for the disciples.

Jesus has been their help, teacher, and comforter.

He has been on their side, fighting for them, building them up.

As Jesus prepares to go to the Father the earthly presence of Jesus that could be in one place at one time is replaced by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who could be with all believers at all times and places.

This Holy Spirit, the Advocate, speaks for the disciples.

It is not good news that we have 2/3rds of the Trinity Advocating, supporting, coming along side of us,
and praying for us?!

This Spirit of Truth, comes as we love Jesus and learn to keep his commands.

We know the disciples continued to struggle with moments of sin, but their feet were set in Jesus' way.

They loved Jesus, they loved his teachings, they embraced his commands to them, and they were learning to live out those commands.

Part of the concern about the death of a Rabbi was that they would be left orphans, in the sense that their guide, the one who had taught them, helped them to see how they should live day by day, who en-fleshed the gospel message and embodied what he taught, would be gone.

But, said Jesus, another Advocate, another teacher, the Spirit of Truth would come to them and dwell in them.

This advocate would come to those who loved Jesus and kept his commands, but this indwelling teacher would also continue to help them live Jesus commands, and love him more and more.

So we see the concentric circles.

We love Jesus and keep his commands, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, comes and makes his home in us and helps us to love Jesus more and more and understand and keep his commands more and more.

I heard a preacher once say that sometimes people are frustrated because Jesus doesn't teach everything at once – and he said that if you wanted to learn more about faith start doing what you already know.

God will reveal next things only after you start following what you do know.

“The World” those outside of the church, outside of the circle of disciples couldn't receive the Holy Spirit because it didn't know him, because it didn't know and love Jesus, didn't keep his commands, and so couldn't “see” or experience the Holy Spirit.

The disciples, already knew the Spirit, because they knew Jesus.

Jesus said to them;

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.

We think of Jesus' work on the cross as being for our salvation, for the forgiveness of our sins, and so it is.

But it is more than that, it is for our forgiveness **from** our sins.

Sin is our self-centered alienation our independence and disintegration from God.

The work of Christ for our salvation sets us free from the power of sin and death, and sets us free to be in communion with him and the Father, through the Spirit.

The power of the cross draws us into communion with God and with others in that life of indwelling love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are restored to our relationship with God, and we are joined to the Father, because Jesus is in the Father, we are in Christ, and he is in us.

The mutual indwelling that we are caught up into through Jesus transforms all our relationships.

In the time of social distancing, and self-isolation, it is the Holy Spirit that continues to bond us to one another.

God is at work in your home, in your life, in all of us joining us in worship – even when we are separated in space.

All our relationships are transformed by our relationship with Jesus.

C.S. Lewis says that you have never met a mere mortal.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously - no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption."

If I am in Christ, and Christ is in me, then I have a different relationship with everyone else who is in Christ.

We are joined in Christ, and the great love Jesus has for you, that love is in me, because Jesus is in me.

That mutual indwelling of Jesus in us, and we in him, transforms how we see his world and all who are in it.

Jesus continued his teaching.

Once again he reminded them to keep his commands, to abide in his ways.

Then he promised that the Holy Spirit would bring abiding peace.

Jesus said;

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives, do I give to you.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Let us pray;

Gracious God, you put a dynamic Spirit, the Holy Spirit into our lives and into the church.

You breathe life in us and give us one who is an Advocate for us, who teaches us and leads us in all truth. Lord, transform our lives, transform our relationships and may your peace

abide in us that we would not be afraid. In the wondrous name of Jesus who is our Lord.

Amen.