

Not Goodbye, but Farewell

John 14:15-31

10/7/18

As we continue our study in John's gospel, I have to confess that parts of this gospel are very difficult for me. And the four-chapter section we're in right now is particularly frustrating. You see, I am a pretty left brained, analytical, logical thinker, and my sermons usually reflect that. I like to move from Point A to Point B to Point C to a conclusion. But John doesn't seem to think that way, at least in the manner he arranges Jesus' goodbye speeches to his disciples in chapters 14-17. As you'll see in today's passage, John careens from one idea to the next and then circles back a time or two to the first idea for good measure! Listen as Bonnie and I read, and I think you'll see what I mean.

*<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>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.*

*<sup>18</sup>"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>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.”*

*<sup>22</sup>Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, “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. <sup>24</sup>Whoever 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.*

*<sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>Peace 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.*

*<sup>28</sup>You 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. <sup>29</sup>And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. <sup>30</sup>I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; <sup>31</sup>but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way. (John 14:15-31)*

OK. Jesus is having dinner with his disciples on the night he will be arrested. He will go to the cross the very next day. He is preparing his disciples for his leaving, and they are struggling to come to terms with what he is telling them. Several recurring themes are emphasized in these verses. There is a call to obey Jesus' commandments as a mark of their love for him. In John, those commands would be to believe in or trust their lives to Jesus, and to love one another. Next, Jesus says he is leaving, but promises to come back. This probably refers to Jesus dying and being buried, but then coming back on Easter morning. And then there is Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit, the first time this has been introduced in John's gospel. That's where we'll spend our time this morning.

A children's Sunday School class was learning the Apostle's Creed. Each Sunday, the kids would line up, and each of them would recite a line of the Creed. One Sunday they were performing this ritual for their parents and other church members. The first child said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and Earth. The second child continued, "and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." And then there was silence, crickets. Finally, a girl stood up and announced to the teacher, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Hollowell, but the boy who believes in the Holy Ghost is absent today!" Sometimes it seems like those who believe in the Holy Spirit are absent from our mainline Protestant churches, too!

My childhood pastor referred to the Holy Spirit as the Cinderella member of the Trinity. Like Cinderella, the Spirit is hard at work, but no one seems to know where it is or exactly what it is doing or how to identify it. At our small group this week, one member commented that she felt she knew a good bit about God the Father, and a good bit about the Son. But she felt she knew very little about the Spirit. Let's see if we can learn a little more about the work of the Spirit in what Jesus has to say in these verses.

*<sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.<sup>17</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>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.<sup>27</sup>Peace 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. (John 14:16,17,25-27)*

In verse 16, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as an "Advocate." Other translations say "Helper," or "Comforter," or "Counselor," or "Encourager" or even "Friend." There are so many different translations because the Greek word Jesus uses here is very difficult to translate. The word is "*paraclete*." (not "parakeet," which is something entirely different!) *Paraclete* literally

means someone who is called alongside. For example, in court a *paraclete* was the legal counsel for a defendant, the one who stood beside the defendant and advised him or her. Here, Jesus promises that the Spirit will come alongside the disciples to guide and encourage them. The Spirit will comfort them, and it will strengthen them to carry out Jesus' commands in the face of opposition to their work.

I don't know if you've ever tried to crush a plastic milk jug. Usually, it's pretty easy to do. But if you forget to take the top off, it takes a tremendous amount of force to crush it! That's because the air pressure inside resists your efforts to smash it. I think the Spirit fills and strengthens us in the same way today, encouraging us, especially when we find it difficult to do the work God calls us to do, work that threatens to crush us, because sometimes it involves ruffling some feathers as we advocate for new ways of doing things that promote peace or justice. Think about the unrelenting pressure on Bishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa when he opposed apartheid there. The inner presence of the Spirit helps us resist the pressure of family, job, and community to leave things as they are, rather than pursuing godly changes.

In addition, the Spirit also abides with us forever. The disciples only had about three years of ministry with Jesus, and then he was gone. But the Spirit would be with them (and us) always. The pronoun "you" here is

plural in verse 17- “*You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*” A Southern translation might be more accurate: “*Y’all know him, because he abides in y’all, and he will be among y’all.*” The Spirit will abide among Jesus’ followers forever. Sometimes we sense this work of the Spirit among us when someone in a small group or class has an insight into the Scripture that helps the whole group make sense of a difficult passage. Sometimes we sense the Spirit at work to reconcile two people who have been separated by real or imagined offenses. Sometimes we sense the Spirit working when our Session is split over an issue, and a way is found to go forward that everyone can support. The Spirit continues to abide in us as individuals and among us as the church.

Notice that Jesus also calls the Spirit the “Spirit of truth,” and in verse 26 says that the Spirit will “*teach you everything*” and “*remind you of all that I have said to you.*” Those early disciples had no books containing Jesus’ sayings, and they couldn’t just Google it! And it was only in retrospect that they understood some of the things he said to them, like the things we find in these very verses. The Spirit helped them remember what Jesus had told them and it taught them the meaning of these things. This enabled them to write down Jesus’ words and actions, so that people like us, living almost 2000 years later, can read them for ourselves. Today, the Spirit

helps us to understand Jesus' teaching, and reminds us of his words in our daily lives when we need them most.

So, Jesus says that the coming Spirit will encourage and strengthen us, will remain with us forever, and will teach us and remind us of Jesus' words. Finally, the Spirit brings peace. And if anyone needed the gift of peace, it was those disciples! Those early disciples faced jail, persecution of themselves and their families, and eventually, even death because of their belief that Jesus was Lord of all. Following Jesus split families, communities, and synagogues. His followers faced rebuke and persecution from within their own Jewish communities and from the Romans on the outside. They needed the peace that the Spirit would bring them to remain faithful in the midst of such turbulent and fearful times, and that is exactly what they got.

Jesus' peace is more than just the cessation of hostilities, although it can include that. It is similar to the Hebrew word, "Shalom," which involves the wholeness of life God intends for us, including a restored relationship with our Creator. The world can't give us that kind of peace, but Jesus can, through his Spirit. I know some of you have experienced that peace during dark and difficult times, and I'd love to hear your stories about those experiences. And if you haven't experienced this peace, pray that the Spirit will give you this gift from God.

I hope this sermon has helped you to see the very practical ways in which the Spirit is at work in our individual lives and in the life of our church. Pray that God will help you see the Spirit's presence around you. Then, keep your eyes, ears, and hearts open to sense the work of the Spirit this week.