

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

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The Advocate

May 14, 2023

John 14: 15–23

On this 6th Sunday of Easter we'll be looking at (part of) what is known as Jesus' farewell discourse from the gospel of John. John's gospel is where we find the story of Jesus washing the disciples feet at the last supper and giving them the commandment to love one another.

In this short passage, Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure and to receive the Holy Spirit. He focuses on what appears to be the gospel writer's favorite theme – love. He stresses the intimate unity of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the human followers. It's a powerful text of promise and hope.

Listen to how God may be speaking to you through these words in John 14: 15–23.

Jesus says, "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, 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.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 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 God, and you in me, and I in you. 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. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and Abba God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” AMEN

All you need is love... love is all you need. So sang the Beatles and so says Jesus in John’s gospel. It’s his dying prayer for you and me.

Jesus uses love verbs 57 times in this book. The word friend appears often in John’s gospel and an unnamed character called “the beloved disciple” appears as well. Love is all over the place here. Arguably one of the most recognizable lines in all of the gospels is John 3:16, ...for God so loved the world... the cosmos.

Jesus says that if his disciples love him, they will keep his commandments.

Careful readers might wonder, what commandments? Unlike the gospel of Matthew, where Jesus asks us to go the extra mile, to turn the other cheek, to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, the only recorded commandment we find in the gospel of John is to love. Jesus says it as part of this longer conversation at the last Supper. He is tender with his friends, knowing that things are going to get real. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (13:34–35). And then in the chapter 15 of John, Jesus says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (15:12–13).

Perhaps the most important question we can ever ask of ourselves is, “In what ways have I loved or not loved today?” Has my life of work, service, prayer, community, friendships, family, school, sports and

recreation been infused with love? The love that Jesus shows us, love that expresses itself in genuine engagement, generous action, authenticity?

As I reflect on that question, I confess that I fall short far more often than I'd like. We, as individuals, a church, a community, have fallen short. Oh, I think we get it right sometimes, but certainly not all the time, or even enough of the time. It's important to reflect on our failures, and as we do, we are wise to remember that Jesus is not about shame and punishment. When Jesus questions peoples' motives in the gospel (Why do you want to be made whole- for example) he already knows the answer. He asks them, and also us, so that we might enter into deeper self-exploration, get to know ourselves better and constantly be moving toward the abundant life and freedom that Christ promises.

Putting love into action in words and deeds, with every thought and every breath is daunting. In some ways, it feels impossible. And yet, this is Jesus' command, to love as he loves. It is our highest calling, and it is soul's deepest work. New Testament scholar D.A Carson says, "This new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, and yet it is profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."

Love takes time, effort, intentionality, honesty, and vulnerability. It looks outward toward the good of another. It isn't always convenient, and it requires effort, it isn't a suggestion. Jesus commands that love shape every decision we make, from where we shop to how we vote, to how we spend our time and how we spend our resources. And it is not just personal, of course, it's communal and physical. Bishop Michael Curry, who I will hear preach and teach at a conference this week writes,

“When love becomes our spiritual center of gravity, it can enter every aspect of life (230).”

In a world of selfishness, indifference, and hatred, Bishop Curry writes that “Love is God’s way, the moral way, but it’s also the only thing that works. It’s the rare moment where idealism actually overlaps with pragmatism. People don’t think of Jesus as a strategist, but he was a leader who successfully built what was essentially a radical equal rights movement within a brutal empire. You don’t do that without being a master strategist.” He argues that love is the only thing that can truly change the world.

Making love our spiritual center of gravity is a big deal, and Jesus doesn’t leave us to figure it out on our own. Were it left to sheer will power and human determination, our small resources would run out, we would grow weary without the reserves and energy needed for the Jesus-shaped love the world requires.

Thankfully Jesus’ commandment is not the end of the story. He does not leave us alone as orphans but assures us that we will have another Advocate to be present with us when he is gone. John makes it clear that Jesus is the first Advocate, the spirit of truth in all things. In Greek, the word “Advocate” is like a defender, someone who comes alongside another.

When we read this text in our Bible study on Thursday, Lisa Pomroy was excited to learn about the Holy Spirit as Advocate, and I agree! From our justice work, we know that an advocate uses their power to evoke change, specifically political and cultural change. She pointed out that in our human lives, and life in community, the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and within us, using the power of God to transform us, to build loving and just communities. She pointed out the movement of the Spirit in the Minnesota state legislature this month in passing an

equitable housing bill, something advocates have worked on for years and years.

In our lives, the Holy spirit comes alongside us and within us, using the power of God to change us, to change communities.

Have you ever faced something that just felt too big, too hard, too scary? A relationship that felt wounded beyond repair? And yet you somehow, some way made it through. Maybe you found a kind of relief and rest when it was needed most. Or you were met with angels along the way that lifted your spirit or offered a shoulder upon which to cry. Or people to work with you, pray with you, listen to you.

As you know, Meg Robles' brother Jerry died recently and unexpectedly at only 69. She told me a story that I can't stop thinking about. Jerry was divorced a while ago and had been estranged from one of his daughters. He prayed, Meg prayed, for years, for their reconciliation. Just this Christmas, Jerry and his daughter found their way back together again. Meg had no idea that this was happening and was moved to tears when she showed up at Christmas. From that time until his death, they spoke often on the phone, making up for years of distance.

That's the power of the Spirit, making a way where there is no way. Alive and at work, moving in and through and within and around us all the time. Her resources are inexhaustible. The Advocate is God's heart, God's spirit, in, through, and all around us. There is always hope.

At the end of this this very short passage, Jesus leaves us with an image of interdependence and mutuality. I am in God, he says, you are in me, and I am in you. When you love, my home is within you.

We need not feel intimidated by Christ's command to love, for the commandment comes as an invitation. As we accept and participate in the love that Christ has poured into us, we, too, are able to share love

with others. We are not merely observers of this kind of love and promise but are an active part of it.

The church is a community of practice, where we show up for each other, pray for each other, support each other and link arms to take Christ's love into the world for justice and peace.

The Advocate – helper, friend, companion, defender, confidante – this spirit of truth, will guide us, inform us, make her home within us. We are invited and encouraged to return over and over to the very source and font of that love knowing we are the conduit, not the source.

The road is long, and the issues we face today are largely spiritual ones. People are frightened, anxious, and distrustful. As God continues to pour God's love into us, we can grow in strength to show up with compassion and love. We can find the courage to take rest as needed, to refuel and rejuvenate, to cultivate our hearts for the future that lies ahead yet cannot be seen. Let us not despair, Jesus has not left us orphaned.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

Sources:

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