

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Ninth Sunday of Livestream Worship

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John 14:15-21

Come, And Be Different



Let us pray:

Today God I ask that you send your Holy Spirit through the words of my mouth as your Word is proclaimed into the Good News. Be our guide as we choose to be your people filled with the Spirit of Truth. Amen.

I want to tell you an old story my grandmother told me when I was not much older than some of our younger children. We were sitting in her kitchen, where she sat every morning by the telephone. This July it'll be twelve years since she passed away, and I try my best each day to remember the little things she taught me about cardinals, faith, and patience. As a kid when you lose a grandparent people like to tell you that "she'll be with you even though she's not here," or "she'll always be watching over you." I honestly like to think that little bits of her live in me. I'm not always sure why certain memories stick and not others, but this one has been with me for a long time.

There was a man walking on the beach. It was about dawn, right when the sun breaks past the horizon and light splashes on the dunes. The man saw someone in the distance dancing along the shore and thought how odd it was for someone to be dancing by himself on the beach at daybreak. When he got closer he realized the person wasn't dancing at all but was picking things off the shoreline and throwing them into the ocean. When the man reached the person he asked him, "What are you doing?" In response the man said, "Well, the sun has risen and the tide is washing away. I'm throwing these starfish back in the ocean so they won't die."

The first man with a smirk on his face said to him, "Well, what difference does it make...this beach is miles long, you can't possibly throw all the starfish back into the ocean." The second man paused, bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it in the ocean as far as he could; and turning back to the man said, "yeah, but it just made a difference to that one."

I think that grandparents are full of stories like this one. And so as we worship together on Senior Recognition Sunday, Graduates, I urge you to take time with the people who came before you...paving a path for you, teaching you little life lessons that in a few years may mean something extraordinary.

In the years to come there will be ups and downs, hills to climb and mountains to conquer; and don't be alarmed if during the trials of this journey you're faced with doubts, because faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin.

The times we most feel doubts creep in are usually when we are overwhelmed with loneliness, or anger, or are feeling forgotten. Right now it is so easy to feel lonely...to feel disconnected from the world...to even feel disconnected from God. We're told to stay at home to protect ourselves and those we love, because that is the responsible action, but I can't help but feel this desperation to be in community with people.

Have you had brief moments of socialization this past week? Wasn't your mood improved afterwards? I know after I collected the face masks donated by our congregation for our mission partners, I was riding that high for days just because I talked to people face to face. It didn't even matter that it was usually through their car windows.

But that feeling of isolation or loneliness doesn't just happen with our friends and family. I know I can attest to times that I felt I was the only one on the end of the phone line when I called God. There have been times I felt he wasn't hearing me, he wasn't actively walking with me making foot prints in the sand beside mine. And doubt would creep in like a familiar friend confirming my fears that God had left the room. Loneliness and anger ride the same line in this situation. All concluding that doubt has overpowered faith.

When we feel these things or have these experiences, we try to fill the hole inside of us with something that won't stick...something that won't stay to satisfy the thirst for something better.

It's so easy for us to find examples of this consuming doubt: a parent is diagnosed with cancer, a car accident takes an innocent life, a natural disaster causes 100,000 to die, life taken too soon, people furloughed or laid off by an out of control virus, the list goes on. And so you see there are many reasons we can give to doubt God.

...and yet today we read some of the final words of Jesus that can reassure us of our faith. To flip the coin back over, here are the words from John, chapter 14, verses 15 through 21; Jesus is speaking:

"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 my Father, 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.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Jesus says to the disciples that the Father will give us another Advocate to be with us forever. This advocate would live in us. The Greek translation of *parakletos* means many things: a counselor, an advocate, one that represents you in court, and most uniquely, a friend.

God is giving us part of himself (the idea of the Trinity) in the form of a friend. And so jumping back into the Upper Room with the disciples listening to Jesus' last words, image how impactful, how reassuring those words were. Their friend, and not just a teacher is predicting his death but promising them an advocate from God, a friend for the rest of their lives. At the end of this passage Jesus turns the focus of the lesson away from the disciples and allows the reader to hear these words from verse 21: "*They (that's us) who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me (still us) will be loved by my Father and I will love them and reveal myself to them.*" And so you see, Jesus wasn't just reassuring the disciples of the power of the Holy Spirit...he's telling us too.

This week I was intrigued by a connection made during our Wednesday Bible Study referring to their study of this gospel reading. Jesus tells the disciples; "*I will not leave you orphaned, I will come to you.*" Besides the obvious meaning of the word orphan, the Wednesday Bible Study took this a step further and defined the Greek word orphanous as a pupil or disciple who is without their teacher.

Teachers, does this resonate with you? Students have been told they cannot return to school for their own protection, but that continues to leave them without their teachers. And I know talking to our youth each week, learning online is not in any way similar to learning from the classroom. Or to our pastors who cannot provide ministry in person to their parishioners!

But this virus will end, and as Jesus promises to the disciples, "*I will come to you.*" Students, your teachers will return with you in the classroom, and, congregation, we will be back together again here in this sanctuary. The virus will end, the stay at home order has been lifted, and life will return to normal. And I believe the church will come back stronger.

And so God gave us the Holy Spirit to be a part of us. Similar to my understanding of death, I knew that my grandmother would always be a part of me. Jesus wanted the disciples to know that in his death God will always be a part of them, and of us. The spirit of truth lives in us.

At this time if you are a Disney fan, perhaps the lyrics of the sentimental song from Lion King, *He Lives In You* is running through your mind. Rafiki telling Simba, "Wait, there's no mountain too great, hear these words and have faith, He lives in you, he lives in me, he watches over everything we see. Into the water, into the truth, in your reflection, he lives in you." To the three writers of this song, I see you. I see what you did there. You made a Disney film about Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit. I won't tell.

There's something about the Holy Spirit that remains a mystery. Perhaps it's because we can't see it, or perhaps we are surprised by its presence in moments we don't expect. But to me it's a puzzle I don't need to finish. Because there are times when you feel the Holy Spirit moving in you, really moving...those times when you lift your hands to the air. You know, you're driving

down Ritchie listening to your Christian music and all of a sudden your hand comes off the steering wheel, and you're transported to this moment of peace, inspiration, joy! Oh! You quickly grab the steering wheel and look around to see if anyone was watching. And then the moment is over.

The Holy Spirit is the God moments I ask the youth to share with me. It's the deep breath of air you take at the sight of a sinking sun over the Severn River. It's the calm you feel when the pastor said exactly how you feel. We believe in it, we receive it because we feel it, and therefore we have to testify. I know I'm speaking to the frozen chosen Presbyterians, but we aren't given this advocate to hold inside in shut rooms. It's something that lives in us to be magnified for the world to see...

who...cannot see...

There is a beating heart inside each of us that God is working through. But it is us who choose to close God off, blaming our doubt because we feel alone or angry. But God responds with grace and the spirit of truth every time and then some more. Imagine if you let God back into your life, truly trusting God completely with your life, recognizing that the Holy Spirit chooses to live in you. What kind of difference would the Holy Spirit make in your life?

Seniors, I told you to take time and listen to your grandparents...to the people who came before you paving your path, because from those lessons you may learn something extraordinary. Well that early morning in the kitchen I thought my grandmother was just telling me a story about starfish, but now I see it in a whole new light. God is like the man determined to throw the starfish back in the ocean. The difference between God and the man throwing the starfish back into the ocean is that God isn't limited by just the stretch of land in front of him...

...and he sent the Holy Spirit to make a difference in our lives every day.

Amen.