



SUNDAY SERMON

in the presence of the advocate ~ awakened to our true selves

The Gospel according to John, chapter 14, verses 15 to 21.

Jesus said, "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."

I've been wondering: If we could do a personal interview of everybody that Jesus met during his lifetime and ask them a few questions, what would be the most common factor in their response? Suppose we ask – How did being with Jesus make you feel? Did you feel different being with Jesus? Did you do anything different, or live different, as a result of being with Jesus? Think of everybody he met – blind Bartimaeus, the rich young ruler, Mary Magdalene and each of the disciples, Lazarus, roman centurions, Pharisees, Pilate, Judas, the Samaritan woman at the well.

If you read through your Bible, you'll observe a pattern – that in virtually every meeting and every relationship, Jesus saw and appreciated the individual's circumstances – usually more clearly than they themselves. He illumined and pointed toward the particular thing that would set that person free – sight, freedom from riches, forgiveness, healing, laying down a grievance, a better use of power. And gave them freedom to chose. He saw them in their totality, saw the possibilities and promise within them and before them, and offered that promise back to them. Take a look. Same pattern, every meeting.

My guess is that in our interviews every single person would express some version of "Jesus saw the best within me. He awoke the truest sense of who I am, deep down. He made me want to become my best self, to aspire and dream to something whole and good."

In the Gospel passage we just heard, Jesus tells the disciples that his departure is imminent. But even though he must leave them, they will not be alone; will not be orphaned; God will send another advocate. Later we will learn that this advocate whom God will send is the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus was our advocate, and sends the Holy Spirit as our ever-present advocate, does that mean that, in God, we have one who is ever setting forth our true selves, calling us to fullness?

Advocate. What does it mean to have an advocate?

Who has advocated for you, on your behalf?

For whom or for what have you advocated?

And if we are a community of people to whom God has given an advocate – in other words, a community that knows God has our back – how much potent potential is present and ready to pop ... in such a community?

Continued

DATE

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
Sun., May 21, 2017

PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin

READINGS

Acts 17:22-31

Psalms 66:7-18

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

Says Biblical scholar David Lose, “the [Greek] word employed by John in this passage – paracletos – and often translated “Advocate” can have several overlapping meanings. It can function in a legal sense, meaning literally one who advocates for you before a court of law. And it can function more relationally by designating one who brings help, consolation, comfort, and encouragement. All of these however, derive from the most basic meaning of the word to “come along side another.”

What does it mean to have an advocate who comes alongside? Before their flight from Afghanistan even arrived in DC, the Kwajah family had scores of parishioners preparing to support them. The Kwajah’s are a family of five, forced to leave their homeland; St. Columba’s’ recently formed refugee response team is hosting and supporting them. Clearing customs, settling in and furnishing an apartment, enrolling in Medicaid, looking for work, enrolling each of the boys in school, learning public transportation, navigating the DMV. There’s no one way to do this; this is life. Those of you most involved are having to listen, adjust, respond in real time. Do we provide for them? Do we help them provide for themselves? What can we do today that will help them most for the future? Even asking the questions is a reflection of deep care. I cannot imagine what it would be to arrive in this country with no one as advocate.

Those who advocated for me, and likely for you, are too many to number. Parents, teachers, coaches, spouses, children, a friend in an hour of need, a crucial contact for that first job. It takes a village. We’ve each been reared and nurtured by one village or another. Perhaps we’ve had a few people along the way about whom we would say, “he awoke the best within me. She saw something in me and evoked my better angels.”

Has Jesus or the Holy Spirit been an advocate for you?

As with our interviewees, do you like something about the sense of yourself that awakens when you’re in Jesus’ presence?

We’d each answer this question differently. Jesus meets each of us precisely where we are. Let me tell you of two ways I experience the Spirit awakening me to my true self. Not all the time, and not limited to these two, but with some consistency.

One way is through contemplative prayer. Some time ago I was practicing a form of prayer called *lectio divina* – “divine reading” – in which one reads a passage of scripture several times and then, in prayer, seeks to enter in to the narrative, to participate in the text. *Lectio divina* is a bit like giving your imagination free rein. In the passage I read, as Jesus and his disciples entered Jericho, a crowd gathered on the road. Among them was a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus. Being short, he climbed into a sycamore tree to get a better view. While passing along Jesus stopped and called out, “come down, Zacchaeus; I am going to stay at your house today.” Zacchaeus hurried down and received Jesus with joy.

It’s not always the case, but that day the narrative really came alive for me. As I entered the story, I found myself clambering up the tree. Jesus stopped, looked up at me and said, “come down.” In that moment, looking down at Jesus looking up at me, I realized two things: one, that this was the invitation I’d been waiting for. Two, I was safe up in that tree – safely removed from whatever Jesus might ask of me, or offer me. “Come down,” he said. Sadly, I shook my head, “no.” “Then I’ll wait,” said Jesus. I grinned, and awoke from my prayer with a heart full of gratitude, ready for something new. For me, entering the silence offers previously unseen horizons.

Another way I’ve felt Jesus awakening me is through gathering with you just like this in worship, to be in your company, to hear once again the stories of God’s love, to be reminded of my hopes for the world, to you hear your stories of faith such as Terry’s, to be reminded of all the different ways the Spirit is moving in our lives. I recently read something surprising: The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home. I love that. Of course, most of the time we tie up together so no one gets lost or goes off a cliff. But the path toward the kingdom of God can feel daunting.

When things get tough up on the mountain, when fear sets in, many a climber is tempted to say, “This is crazy! I’m going home.” The life of faith can be like that - as we scale the mountains of justice, of compassion, the peaks and valleys of partnership with the most vulnerable among us... doubts set in, despair threatens, and the whole notion of believing in God seems crazy. Jesus knew his disciples would have days like that. So he told them we’re tied together like branches on the vine. “I will not leave you orphaned,” said Jesus. “I am coming to you.” So we gather, extend our hands and hearts in prayer, tie up with ropes of love and grace, and carry on refreshed and renewed – singing a new song.

Thus do we rejoice, “Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to God from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.