

The Spirit of Resurrection  
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John 14:15-21

15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

17 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.

18 “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

21 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.”

ORPHANED

“I will not leave you orphaned.” That’s what Jesus told his disciples. That word, orphaned, has always captured my imagination. What does it mean to be orphaned?

The orphaned are alone. The orphaned are without guidance or support. The orphaned do not have parents or anyone else for that matter. The orphaned are isolated.

When we are orphaned we feel like no one cares whether we live or die.

Orphaned, that word says a lot. It's a really depressing and terrifying word. And although we think of children when we see this word we can be orphaned at any age.

At any given time all of us can be orphaned, at least in spirit. And that's how the disciples felt.

If you have to tell someone that you are not going to abandon them, it is because they feel you are slipping away. Last week we learned that the disciples' hearts were troubled, and today's lesson is a continuation of Jesus trying to reassure these disciples with a troubled heart.

He told them, "I will not leave you alone. I will not leave you orphaned."

But, how can Jesus say that? In just a few hours, that will happen. He will be arrested. He will be tried. He will be crucified. He will be buried.

How can Jesus say that he will not leave his disciples alone?

After Jesus' death the disciples will find themselves very much alone and abandoned. They will be isolated from each other and afraid of everything on the other side of a locked door. The old spiritual goes, "sometimes I feel like a motherless child."

That's how the disciples will feel.

## MEMORIAL DAY

We don't think of what happened to Jesus as an experience of combat, but as I look at this story we do find some points in common.

The story of Jesus' arrest includes soldiers, spears and at least a moment of combat. Peter slices off the ear of one of those who was sent to arrest Jesus.

But, more than that, when the disciples fail to keep watch with Jesus and fail to protect him in the garden, they feel utterly and totally alone. The trauma of this event cripples them emotionally. They deny what they believe in most deeply. They run away.

Like soldiers that have been shell shocked, the disciples don't know where to turn or what to do. It seems like a story that fits very well with the holiday we will celebrate tomorrow, Memorial Day

Memorial Day was started after the Civil War to remember all soldiers who died in the War. It was a way to acknowledge the fact that tragedy and loss do not take sides in war. Human loss leaves everyone feeling alone and vulnerable.

Just as the disciples were deeply troubled by the death of Jesus, so many families feel a terrible void in their lives when a loved one does not come home. And even those who do come home often find that their homecoming is not what they had hoped.

Soldiers are changed by what they go through in war, and for some it is too much to bear. For example, every 18 hours a person who serves in the military (either active or reserve) commits suicide.

It seems to me that Memorial Day must be more than a time to remember and honor the dead, though that is very important. Memorial Day is also a time to remember those who are wounded by war, both externally and internally.

And maybe we should go even farther in our Memorial Day celebration, remembering all those who have experienced loss in the past year. Some have lost a loved one. Some have lost a job. Some have gone through a divorce.

As a society we don't like to remember the losses of life.

Maybe it's because we prefer to celebrate youth and opportunity.

Maybe we don't like to think about our own mortality.

Whatever the reason we're not good at doing Memorial Day. We prefer taking a road trip and having a picnic.

## A FAITH THAT REMEMBERS

But, remembering is important. More than that, as a community of faith we are charged to remember.

I once wrote a sermon entitled, “A Faith That Remembers for a World That Forgets.” I think that may be my best sermon title ever.

When we take communion Jesus tells us to take the bread and the wine as a way of remembering him and the sacrifice of the cross. Through remembering the cost of our salvation we are given strength and perspective for the living of our days.

The Christian community does not run from the hard memories of life because we believe that God’s salvation is greater than the cross. We remember even when the world forgets.

And because we remember we are given the opportunity to minister to those who feel isolated and alone. Jesus has told us that He will not leave us like orphans, and so in Jesus’ name we are called to remember those that the world forgets.

What can we do to reassure those who feel isolated and alone?

One therapist says that what we need to do is find a way to “blunt their isolation.” He wrote, “Do it with cups of tea or with long talks or by sitting in a room nearby and staying silent or in whatever way suits the circumstances, but do that.”

Jesus promises to blunt the isolation of his disciples. He will not leave them alone. He will come to them. He will open up locked doors.

## THE ADVOCATE

More than that, Jesus told the disciples that God would send them another Advocate, His Spirit that will be with them forever.

The word Advocate is often used to describe someone who speaks for you in a court of law. But, it can also be used in a more personal, relational way. The Advocate is the one who brings help, consolation, comfort and

encouragement. Literally the Greek word means to “come along side another.”

When we are in trouble we have an advocate (or a lawyer) who speaks for us and seeks to protect us in a court case. If you are trying to navigate the maze of health care rules and options, there are people who serve as advocates. They come alongside us and help us make wise choices.

If we think that certain laws are unjust, we may support those who speak for us before the legislature. They are our advocates. They seek to protect us and further our cause.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is our Advocate in heaven. He is the great high priest who atones for our sin and yet at the same time knows what it means to be weak and human.

It is comforting to know that the throne of God is also a throne of grace. It is comforting to know that when that final trumpet blows the one who is in a position to judge is also the one who died for us, who rose for us, who reigns in power for us.

When we are under threat we talk about someone having our back. In peacetime we say that someone is right beside us. This is the idea. We are not alone.

Jesus told the disciples, “I will have your back. I will be right beside you. You will not be alone.”

Jesus was the first Advocate. In Jesus, God came alongside us. The Word became flesh. In Jesus we came to know and see the otherwise invisible God. (1 John 1:1-18)

But, after the resurrection and the ascension the disciples were energized and transformed by another Advocate, the coming of the Spirit. It was the Spirit of God that transformed discouraged and troubled disciples into courageous evangelists. It was the Spirit of God that created the church, the community of faith.

## THE SPIRIT IN HUMAN FORM

The gospel of John emphasizes the glory of the incarnation. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) And in this passage the glory is expanded. Not only does God come to us in the humanity of Christ. God also comes to us through other disciples who are filled with the Spirit.

Mainline Christians feel a little uneasy about the third Person of the Trinity. We can talk about God. We can talk about Jesus. But, we're not so sure about the Spirit. It all sounds a little nebulous to us. What exactly can we say about the Spirit?

Well, this passage teaches us that the Spirit abides in us and enables us to do God's will. It turns out that the Spirit and things spiritual are not the domain of the religious extremists or those who have strange new age ideas. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ living in us.

In this way spiritual things take on a very "earthy" human form.

We meet the Spirit of the risen Christ in the form of brothers and sisters who believe in the way of Jesus. And we can experience the work of the Spirit in our own lives as we too seek to follow the one who is the way, the truth and the life.

The church is God's down to earth solution for the problem of loneliness. God has given us each other. Through the power of the Spirit the Christian community is created and sustained.

Jesus told his disciples in verse 15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And how did Jesus define love? Love means service in the name of Jesus. Those first disciples passed on the love that had received from Jesus to others. And that process continues even today.

As we mentioned last week, in the chapter that precedes our lesson for today, Jesus washed his disciples feet as a symbol of humble service.

And after this Jesus told them, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

The presence of the Spirit is not primarily an inward mystical experience of the individual. The presence of the Spirit is made manifest in the actions of the community of faith.

Jesus told his disciples, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:20) This means that the presence of the Spirit comes through the very down to earth relationships we have with other Christians.

In the Apostle’s Creed we say that we believe in the “communion of saints.” What does this mean? You may have noticed that this assertion is prefaced by belief in the third person of the Trinity. We say that we believe in “the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints ...”

In other words the church is more than just a collection of like-minded people. The church is the place where the Spirit resides. The holy catholic church or the holy universal church is a communion of saints. The church is that place where we learn what it means to be called by God.

We do the work of the Spirit when we come along side each other in good times and bad. We do the work of the Spirit when we are each other’s advocates. We do the work of the Spirit when we love each other.

This is how we come to know the truth. This is how we follow the commands of Jesus. This is how we experience life in the Spirit.

We “abide” in the Spirit, and the Spirit “abides” in us.

## A COMMUNITY TIED TOGETHER BY LOVE

The love of the Christian community bears witness to the gospel. Jesus said that this is how the world would know that we are His disciples. How did that old campfire song put it? “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Love in this sense is not just an emotion. Love is first and foremost an action; love is a way that we live together. We are a community of grace that is based upon remembering the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Memorial Day is important because on this day we remember that freedom isn’t free. If we forget the cost of freedom we are bound to abuse the freedom we have and become less than we should be as a nation. A common memory binds us together as a people.

In the same way if the church does not remember the cost of salvation we are in danger of becoming isolated from the source of our salvation. Instead of living an abundant life we live a life that is dictated by enslaving forces of the society in which we live. Instead of living a life based upon mutual service we live a life based upon self-interest.

Sometimes the change is so subtle that we barely notice when it happens. But, it has happened. In many cases the church has become merely a reflection of society instead of a beacon to society.

And the results have been tragic.

Nothing is more dangerous than an earthly kingdom sanctioned by a church that has forgotten who she is. Nothing is more dangerous than a church that does not speak God's truth to power. Nothing is more dangerous than a church that does not call for a more just and loving society.

Nothing is more disappointing than when we in the church forget the most important thing we are called to do, to love one another as God in Christ has first loved us.

But, nothing is more hopeful than a church that remembers in a world that forgets. Nothing is more hopeful than a church that loves as Jesus loves and helps others come to know that love.

The church truly is a hospital for sinners. When people are terribly injured by sin (either their own sin or the sins of others). They don't need pity or absolution.

What they need is a community of faith. They need a place where they can love others, and where others can love them back.

This is the sort of community that Jesus brings to life. This is what Jesus was talking about when he told his disciples about another Advocate, the Spirit of Truth and Consolation.

God in Christ is with us in the Spirit. And we are with each other. No one is left behind. No one is orphaned. And this Advocate, this Spirit of Truth is also the Spirit of resurrection. He is the Spirit of Transformation. He is the Spirit of new life.

We are still celebrating Easter in the church.

And today we celebrate the Spirit of resurrection. Resurrection was more than just Jesus rising from the dead. Resurrection was the beginning of a new creation.

When we remember Jesus it is about more than just what happened way back when; it's also about what happens here and now.

Charles Cousar, my New Testament professor in seminary put it this way, "The relationship between disciples and Teacher is not to degenerate into sentimentality or into a wistful nostalgia once he has gone, about 'how wonderful things were when Jesus was with us.' No, instead love expresses itself in obedience, in keeping Jesus' words."

I'm afraid that much of what passes for faith these days is sheer nostalgia. We talk lovingly about the Jesus of days gone by, but we say very little about what that means for us here and now. If we really love Jesus we need to follow his way and do what he commands us to do here and now.

This is the comfort and the challenge of the community formed by the power of the Spirit. We are not alone, but that also means we cannot be complacent.

We cannot succumb to the rhetoric of despair that is so rampant in our society. We always believe that something can be done because God in Christ has given us the promise of the Spirit.

Someone once wrote, "The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home." That may be true. Some mountain climbing seems pretty crazy at times.

But, there are other reasons they are tied together. Mountain climbers are tied together to keep from getting lost or going over a cliff.

It's the same reason we are tied together in the community of faith.

The climb up the mountain of life gets steep, and out of fear we are tempted to say, "This is foolish. I'm going home."

Doubt sets in and despair overwhelms us, and the whole notion of believing in God seems crazy.

Jesus knew the disciples would have days like that. Jesus knew we would have days like that.

So, he told us that he was sending us another Advocate. He was sending us the Spirit that would tie us together.

We are like those climbers on the mountain who have a life and death connection. When we are tempted to go back down the mountain we realize that others are around us who are with us and for us. And we are with them and for them.

Going down the mountain is not an option.

The Spirit of the resurrected Christ keeps us together and moving on the journey of faith. He still comes to us. He will not leave us orphaned.

The Spirit ties us to God in Christ, and the Spirit ties us to each other.

We feel the tug on the rope whenever we are tempted to run away from the challenge and go back down the mountain

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So, let us remember the Spirit of resurrection. Just as God breathed life into lifeless clay and created human beings so God can and will breath life in us now and in all the days to come.

Let us pray.

By the power of your Spirit bind us together Lord. Tie us to Jesus and to each other. Make our faith more than just nostalgia about what happened long ago. Make our faith a living faith. Help us love one another as you first loved us. In the name of Jesus we ask it.

Amen.