

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)

May 14, 2023

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

“The wonderful gift”

The Holy Gospel according to

John 14:15-21

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.”

Give us today our daily consolation
(comfort) as we give Christ's consolation
(comfort) to others. Amen.

On a typical Sunday in a local church, a Sunday school class was reviewing the Apostles' Creed. The teacher asked each child to repeat one part they had committed to memory. The teacher said, "Okay, class, let's begin." The first little boy stood up and began, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth." He sat down and a little girl stood up and said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." She sat down, and there

was a long silence as the kids looked at each other uncomfortably. Finally one little girl stood up and said, “I'm sorry, teacher, but the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit is absent today.”

We might say that those who believe in the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Paraclete are absent today. Many believers in Jesus Christ could be described like the disciples in Ephesus, when Paul said to them, “‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’” (Acts 19:2). I think there are

many believers who theoretically believe in the Holy Spirit, but for all practical purposes, He's not real to them. Pastor A.W. Tozer said, "The idea of the Spirit held by the average church member is so vague as to be nearly non-existent."

[Thanks to Skip Heitzig and Nicky Gumbel]

<http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the-connection/read/articles/the-invisible-personal-and-powerful-holy-spirit-15898.html>

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You may be familiar with the newspaper cartoon some years ago called Calvin and Hobbs, the names of a very bright young six year old boy named Calvin and his big talking pet tiger, Hobbes, who have delightful and insightful experiences together. One day Calvin and Hobbs come marching into their living room early one morning. Calvin's mother is seated in her favorite chair. She is sipping her morning coffee, and looks up at young Calvin. She is amused and amazed at how he is dressed. Calvin's head is encased in a large clear plastic bowl, looking like a space helmet. A big cape is draped around his neck, across

his shoulders and down his back and is dragging on the floor. One hand is holding a flashlight and his other hand holds a baseball bat.

“What’s up today? Asks Calvin’s mom.

“Nothing, so far,” answers Calvin.

“So far?” she questions.

“Well, you never know,” Calvin says,

“Something could happen today.”

Then Calvin marches off, and adds, “And if anything does happen, by golly, I am going to be ready for it!”

Calvin’s mom pauses and looks out at the reading audience, and she says, “I need a suit like that!”

In our sometime chaotic world we may feel a suit like Calvin's might help, so we can say with Calvin, "Whatever may come my way, I'm going to be ready for it! Bring it on!"

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People translating the New Testament into the Karre language of the mountain regions of the Central African Republic in equatorial Africa were having difficulty coming up with a word to translate the Greek word for the Holy Spirit. "Advocate" is the word used in today's Gospel lesson in English, but the Greek word in the original

Gospel text is “parakletos”, Paraclete. How could they describe the Holy Spirit in the Karre language? Very few understood the word “Advocate” or “lawyer”. Then the translators noticed porters walking in a line along a path, each carrying a heavy burden—except for one person. That one person was carrying nothing. When the translators asked why, they learned that the man carrying no burden was expected to help anyone who became too exhausted to carry his own burden. They called him, “The one who falls down beside us.” And that gave the translators their word for

“parakletos” – “The one who falls down beside us.”

Maybe today we do need someone to ‘fall down beside us,’ I don’t know. But God always hears the words of our prayers and always gives us the best answer to our problems and situation, even though at times we may not understand. But my suggestion is to be faithful and keep calm and rest on God’s Holy Assurance that God is and will continue to be with you and with us as a worshipping community. And when God does the miracle or miracles God has in store for us, be sure to give God all the glory and praise and thanksgiving. The Holy

Spirit is among us, and with us as Christians—the Bishop who confirmed us speaks directly to God for the confirmands, per the Book of Common Prayer on Page 310, and the Bishop says, “let [God’s] Holy Spirit be ever with them”.



God says God’s ways are superior to our parent’s ways and even our best friends ways in that God never forgets us, never. We are always under God’s watchful care by way of the Paraclete, the Advocate, the One called around us, the One hovering about us, the One doing everything possible for us to be God’s child in the world. Is that

not a comforting feeling, that God continues to care for us forever, regardless of any human being we may know? How many times were we ‘on our own’ without our parents or friends, and things still turned out fine? That was God’s doing through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

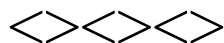
Jesus asks us to love others and the heavenly Father, and to wash one another’s feet, to care for others regardless of how we may feel about their needs. Those are the commandments for our lives. We are to forgive even when someone sins against us seven times seventy times. And we are to love even our enemies. That is actually

quite a tall order, isn't it? In war times we are killing one another, which is why war must be so abhorrent to God. But that is the reality of our times.

In the ancient Greek courts one did not have a lawyer as we are accustomed to have today. But one was able to gather around oneself a set of friends, counselors, advisors when one was in court to help one argue one's case successfully. These people were one's "paracletes".

Another impressive image of the Paraclete comes from ancient Greek warfare. Since the armor was nearly non-

existent on a soldier's back, a paraclete was a fellow combatant who fought directly behind us, protecting our rear, so to speak. That soldier, the paraclete, would be able to save our lives in hand-to-hand combat when we were under attack. In similar way, when the satan, the great deceiver, has us under attack, God's Holy Spirit is there to protect us from falling.



Jesus says, “If you love me, keep (teresete) my commandments” (v. 15 WEB). This passage begins and ends (vv. 15, 21) by tying love to obedience. Our obedience is a

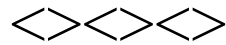
sign of our love. In this Gospel, faithfulness to Jesus' words is a defining mark of discipleship (John 8:31; 37, 51; 12:47-48). The Greek word for "keep ("teresete") my commandments" (v. 15), teresete means 'to do or to fulfill'. And the word for "commandments" ["hentolas"] is plural. In this Gospel Jesus has given the disciples three commandments (Lincoln, 393):

Commandment One: "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also

should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15 WEB).

Commandment Two: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love (“agapate”—from “agape”) one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35 WEB). The agape love that Jesus commands is not sentimental feeling, which cannot be commanded, but loving action, which Jesus very strongly affirms.

Commandment Three: “Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me” (John 14:1 WEB).



Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “another parakletos,” the implication being that Jesus himself is also a “parakletos”. However, as a “parakletos”, Jesus is limited by the Incarnation—by time and space. He could be in only one place at a time, and could help only a limited number of people in any given time. Moreover, as Jesus is saying these words to his closest disciples, he is moving toward his glorification—his death, resurrection, and ascension—so he will be

leaving the disciples. The ‘new’ “parakletos”, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will be with all disciples everywhere and will be with them forever.

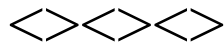
However, even though the Spirit— “parakletos” is coming to help us on earth, Jesus continues to serve as our “parakletos” in heaven. Hear First John 2:1 -- “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”.

“Here the ascended Lord is viewed as a Paraclete in the court of heaven, pleading the cause of his own; the Holy Spirit is then understood as the Paraclete from heaven,

supporting and representing the disciples in the face of a hostile world” (Beasley-Murray, 256). This must have been a welcome word to the Johannine church, which was suffering persecution and had to feel some sense of abandonment by Jesus.

This parakletos “is the Spirit of truth, whom the world (kosmos) can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him” (v. 17a WEB). “It is interesting to see the Spirit associated with truth, for we have just had Jesus describe himself as ‘the truth’ (v. 6), and we earlier learned that those who worship the Father must do so ‘in truth’

(4:23-24). Clearly truth is very closely associated with the Godhead” (Morris, 577).



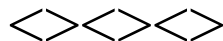
Let me reflect for a moment on a truth which sometimes is in the mind of church attenders:

Eugene Peterson, the currently popular Bible translator, in his memoir “The Pastor”, picks up on the deceitful nature of the lures to congregational “growth” that aim at drawing a crowd. Peterson says, “Classically, there are three ways in which humans try to find transcendence — religious meaning, God meaning — apart from God as revealed in the cross of Jesus:

One, through the ecstasy of alcohol and drugs; two, through the ecstasy of recreational sex; and three, through the ecstasy of crowds. Church leaders frequently warn against the drugs and the sex, but, at least in America, they almost never warn against the crowds, probably because they get so much ego benefit from the crowds. But a crowd can destroy the Spirit of God as thoroughly as excessive drink and depersonalized sex,” Peterson opines. “[Crowds tend to] take us out of ourselves, but not to God, only away from [God]. The religious hunger is rooted in the unsatisfactory nature of the self. We hunger

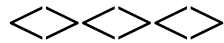
to escape dullness, the boredom, the tiresomeness of me. ... A crowd is an exercise in the false transcendence upward, which is why all crowds are spiritually pretty much the same, whether at football games, political rallies, or church.”

<http://livingchurch.org/covenant/2017/05/19/fairly-facing-congregational-decline/>



I would like to close today with an old Southern prayer. It says:

“O Lord, help me to understand that you ain't goin' to let nuthin' come my way that You and I, together, can't handle.” Amen.



Rev. Billy D. Strayhorn serves as Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Joshua, Texas, told this story:

A set of twin girls were born 12 weeks premature, each about two pounds. They were placed in separate bassinets. One started to do just fine, the other one began

slowly to fade. Her heart beat was rapid, she was visibly anxious, and nothing the nurses could do seemed to be able to stop what seemed like her inevitable death.

Then one of the nurses remembered something she'd read about treatment of preemies elsewhere in the world. As a sort of last resort the nurses put the weaker twin, right into the bassinet with, her 'big sister.' (she was only 3 ounces bigger!) The results were immediate and dramatic. The littlest twin snuggled up to her sister, and her heart rate immediately slowed to normal. Her color came back. The baby visibly relaxed, almost it seemed with a sigh of relief. She

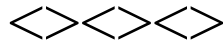
accepted nourishment. The crisis was over. She would survive.

That tiny baby did not know who she was, or where she was. But somehow she knew where she belonged. And she knew when she was where she belonged.

Our souls, our spirits, are like that-- deeper than words, back behind all conscious thought, our souls know what they need. And sometimes all they need is to know that they are not alone, someone, you perhaps, are there to walk with them through whatever it is they are facing, walking with another as a companion, not a judge, not a guide, not as someone with all

the answers; but simply as a loving and caring companion. As their friend and a friend of Jesus who lets them know they are not alone.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-1415-21-difference-make-strayhorn>



Martin Niemoeller was a noted pastor in Berlin during the Nazi time, but before that he was a renowned U-boat commander during World War I. Niemoller was persecuted and imprisoned by the Nazis but for too long he remained silent in the face of

injustice. He used words from experience which have become famous:

“When they came for the Jews, I said nothing.

I was not Jewish.

When they came for the Socialists, I said nothing.

I was not a Socialist.

When they came for the Catholics, I said nothing.

I was not a Catholic.

When they came for me, no one said anything.

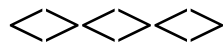
There was no one left.”

Even for Christians, it is possible to so dull our conscience, warp our conscience, that we numb ourselves to the needs around us, injustice, bigotry, tyranny, want. If we are to let our conscience guide us, we must make sure that the spirit within us is the same Holy Spirit promised by Jesus. The Spirit will always point us to the Lord, direct us according to God's Word, enable us to witness to the love of God. We must test the inner voice, our inner promptings, by the external Word. We have been promised a Counselor, Comforter, Advocate and Guide. God's Spirit will never contradict God's

Word. God's Spirit will always glorify God and be true to Christ.

[the Rev. Dr. James D. has served as pastor of Central Lutheran Church, Eugene, Oregon, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Fargo, North Dakota; St. John's Lutheran Church, Baroda, Michigan; and Edison Park Lutheran Church, Chicago.]

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-1415-21-let-conscience-guide-kegel>



The following is from a reflection for children by writer, Lois Parker Edstrom:

Object suggested: A ball to represent an Emperor penguin's egg – for demonstration purposes. (An Emperor penguin's egg measures about 4-5 inches in length and weighs approximately 12 – 18 ounces.)

Picture of adult and baby Emperor penguin is available at:

<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=35>

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(Click on picture to enlarge the image.)

Emperor penguins are the largest of all penguins. They grow to be three feet high (demonstrate) and can weigh one hundred pounds. That is a big bird!

They live in Antarctica where it is very cold; mostly snow and ice. The way that Emperor penguins take care of their babies is quite interesting.

The mother penguin lays only one egg. She holds the egg on the tops of her feet to keep it off the ice. (Demonstrate) Soon after the egg is hatched she carefully moves the precious egg to the top of the father's feet so

she is able to go into northern waters where there are fish for her to eat.

The father penguin cares for the egg while holding it on his feet. He tucks a loose flap of his skin over the egg to keep it warm so it will hatch. The father spends about two months sheltering the egg, making sure it does not get cold. During that time the father penguin does not eat at all! He may lose up to one-half of his body weight.

By the time the chick has hatched the mother penguin is back from her journey. The baby penguin is then moved back to its

mother's feet, being careful to keep it off the ice.

Can you see how much care is given to the egg and then the chick? There is always a parent there to provide what is needed.

When Jesus prepared to return to God the Father [after his Resurrection from the dead] he had a plan to take care of those who were left behind. He said, "I will not leave you orphaned." (Orphans are children who do not have anyone to take care of them.)

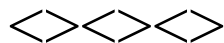
Jesus said that he would not leave us orphaned. He told his disciples that he would send the Spirit of Truth to be with us forever. The Spirit of Truth is the part of God which lives inside of us. It is that Spirit which helps us know right from wrong and teaches us how to love and care for each other. When you accept God's love you are forever warmed by His Spirit. You are a precious child of God.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/childrens-sermons/warmed-by-gods-spirit>

[Lois Parker Edstrom is a freelance writer and poet who has authored two non-fiction books, "Contemporary Object Lessons for

Children’s Church”, Baker Book House and “Object Talks on the Parables of Jesus”, Standard Publishing. Other published non-fiction work includes several articles and Christmas programs.

Lois’ poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals such as *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Floating Bridge Review*, *Rock & Sling*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Adanna*, and *Mobius*. Her poetry also appears in various anthologies.



Today is Mothers Day. We all have or have had mothers, and of course without them we would not be here today. My Mother assured me that I could do whatever I wanted to do. Now is that not both a challenge and an obligation? After retirement, I decided that I had always wanted to practice medicine, and that is why I am a Med 5 medical student who is hoping to pass the Step 1 examination soon so I can get practical experience in various clinics and become a medical doctor. With God's help, I shall be able to accomplish what I have set out to do. But let me give you the same encouragement that my mother gave to

me. What do you in your heart want to do? Decide what that is and do it to the best of your ability. That is what your own mother would want for you. Let us give thanks for the encouragement mothers have and can give their children this Mothers Day. Amen.

“The Wonderful Gift”

Description:

The coming of the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is announced by Jesus to his disciples as the Holy Person of the Trinity who will be with them always, even as Jesus will relate our needs to the ears of his Heavenly Father as our Advocate when he ascends to heaven. This saying is in the context of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper in the Gospel according to John. Give God thanks for all our Mothers this Mothers Day.

Key words:

Advocate, Spirit, Truth, Holy, Spirit, Jesus,
Christ, John, Last, Supper, God, heaven,
heavenly, African, Calvin, Hobbes, Tiger,
comforter, consoler, paraclete, Gospel,
disciples, penguins, egg, Strayhorn,
Edstrom, love, agape, feet, wash, sermon,
mother, Mothers, Day, thanks