

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
May 14, 2023 – 6 Easter
John 14:15-21
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

This morning's reading from the Gospel of John is – like last week's reading – a portion of what are called Jesus' "farewell discourses," his final words to his closest friends and followers spoken just before his arrest and the events that culminated in his crucifixion. In the words we just read we hear Jesus telling his disciples how they will stay connected to him after his death. His words are as relevant to us as they were to those disciples.

First, on the disciples' side of the relationship. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." What does Jesus command? Love. Love one another. Serve one another. Wash one another's feet. Do what I have done. Stretch out your hands to heal, to feed. Take up your cross and follow me. Jesus told his followers, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). And by this, the disciples of Christ – past, present, and future – show their love for him.

On Jesus' side of the relationship? "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth." Jesus is speaking about the Holy Spirit. The Greek word is "parakletos," or, in English, Paraclete, which means "one who stands beside," a supporter or comforter. Jesus is preparing the disciples for his death, his leaving. Throughout their journey together Jesus has always been standing beside his disciples. He has taught them, guided them, and shown them the love of God. He recognizes how lost they will be without him. So, he gives them assurance that they will not be left alone, without comfort and support. He promises them ongoing, divine assistance in their journey of life and discipleship, in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises: the Holy Spirit "will be in you." Our helper and comforter, the spirit of our Lord, within us, forever. That is the promise given by Christ.

Jesus gives his disciples further assurance. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." Christ will come again, in glory. We are waiting for that day, when the kingdom of God will be established forever. The day when we will know what we now believe. In Jesus' words, "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." As St. Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12-13).

In our secular calendar, today is a day when throughout our country people are engaged in remembrance, in remembering and honoring mothers. At the end of the month, in our secular calendar, we will remember the men and women who gave their lives in the wars of our country's history. Communities will gather to honor the memory of these persons, both known and unknown to us personally. We take time this weekend and at the end of the month for remembrance, for calling to mind what is important in our personal lives and in our civic history.

In the church we practice remembrance every Sunday. When we read the portions of the Bible appointed for each week, we remember what is important in our salvation history. We learn about how God has often acted in history, beginning with the Exodus – the deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt twelve to fourteen hundred years before Christ. We are reminded, especially as we pray the Psalms, of how other people who love God have been in relationship with God, in good times and bad times. In the Gospels, we remember the teaching and the works of Jesus during his ministry. And in the Acts of the Apostles and the many letters in the New Testament, we recall how the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, was at work in the church for the first 130 years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Every Sunday we practice remembrance when we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. We recall – we bring to our attention, to the “front” of our minds – what God has done for us, especially through Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. As we understand it in the Anglican tradition, remembrance is much more than merely recalling an event or persons of the past. Remembrance involves incorporating the event, participating in the event, becoming the event. In the Holy Eucharist we incorporate the person of Jesus, we receive Jesus and we give ourselves to Jesus. In the church we refer to ourselves collectively as the body of Christ, and each one of us is a member of the body of Christ. Through our participation in the Holy Eucharist we signify our willingness – as a worldwide group and as individuals – to be broken and poured out to show the world the love of God, as Jesus did.

Do you know the word “remembrancer?” A remembrancer is “one that causes another to remember.” That is a good definition of one aspect of being a priest. I see my work as a preacher in that way. I remind myself and others about Jesus, using the written witness of faithful people found in Holy Scripture. In the Eucharist, using the words of the Prayer Book and the actions practiced by Christian men and women since the time of the early church, I remind myself and others of what Jesus did on the night before he died, at the Last Supper.

Being a remembrancer is also a good definition of one aspect of being a member of the church. When we come to church and when we demonstrate our faith through our lives in countless ways, we remind ourselves and one another that God has touched our hearts, that God is in our personal history, in our present lives, and in our future. When we love others, we may help them remember that God loves them.

The Holy Spirit has many, many names. One might be “remembrancer,” for the Holy Spirit reminds us, deep within our hearts and souls, of God, of Jesus, of divine love, of faithful living, of the hope given through the promises of Christ, of all that is good and godly. The Holy Spirit is that “still, small voice” always prepared to speak to us if we will listen, abiding with us, leading us to the truth, helping us to live as Jesus did, for the love of God and the welfare of God’s precious world.

So may we always pray, in the words of the hymn we sang a few minutes ago, “With the healing of division, with the ceaseless voice of prayer, with the power to love and witness, with the peace beyond compare: come, Holy Spirit, come” (Hymn 513, “Like the murmur of the dove’s song”). In Jesus’ name. Amen.