

#27 10-11

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

From Orphans to Advocates

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."

According to John, Jesus is basically saying, "If you love me, you will love - God, yourself, your neighbor - your enemy!" And to help you in those endeavors he will make sure that there is a way for him to inspire and be with us always - that would be the Holy Spirit - the Paraclete - Paraklētos. That is John's term for the "the Spirit of Truth" or "Holy Spirit" - other definitions include: advocate, counselor, comforter, helper, mediator, even "broker." And when that happens - all become one - Christ and father and followers - all one in the spirit - all advocates for all of humanity together - called to love as best we can.

Nancy J. Ramsey wrote, "The love that Jesus wants his hearers to embrace is not an abstract philosophical concept but the lived reality revealed in the life, relationships and actions of a simple Nazarene who looks and talks like them and lives simply among them. He feeds the hungry, touches the lepers, heals the sick, and speaks and acts towards women with care and compassion. It is also seen in his fierce protests against those who abuse this vision of the value of each person and the importance of power as domination, Jesus invites those who meet him to imagine power that has as its goal the well-being of all persons regardless of social status."

I believe we are witnessing a social change in this country. As more and more people struggle with the problems of this recession there is a growing need to be aware of all those around us, and to understand what they might be going through. One example I will share, that helps me form my thought here. Last Thursday I got a call from a woman I'll call Chris, who I have been ministering to. She has no car and is struggling to make money for her family with a cleaning business. She got a job in a very nice neighborhood and found a way to get there. She was planning on taking the train back home, but the woman whose house she cleaned made her wait over 3 hours for her payment, after having cleaned her house for over 4 hours. The householder was home all day, but just as Chris was leaving she had to dash off in one of their 3 cars to pick up 2 of her children, then dash away to pick up a third, bring it home and then the woman did not have the cash that was promised. Chris missed her train. I came to pick her up and take her home.

Now, on the one hand, I can understand the busy mother of three, putting her children first. I imagine she had a long list of things to do and was amazing in all she does. She had no time to think about Chris' requirements - Chris was the lowest of her priorities - children first - I get that - I truly do!

But I also tried to understand how it felt for Chris. She once had a car and it was vandalized and totaled, she once had a thriving income, and slowly she saw her clientele lose their home and jobs and she lost income. She once had such a home - and lost it. And now she is struggling to work - walking everywhere - to the train station - to the bus stop - to the grocery store - walking and working, and never giving up hope. And she looks at this home, these cars, these very busy people, and know that she is the lowest on this woman's list of priorities.

There is just a compassion chasm there – some sort of missing awareness. Some of “those who have” are so busy that they don’t have time to make “those that don’t have” one of their priorities. It seems like such a far away concept for some to think of the needs of those people who perform services for them as make them priorities.

But that is what Jesus is saying we are to do – to be advocates for those who fall under the radar of your average busy survivor. Jesus is an advocate and the Holy Spirit is another, and they are all part of God. And when we advocate – we are a part of the whole shebang!

Now, today is Memorial Day, a day that we honor those who fought and died while advocating for humanity and peace through military service. It is historically a relatively new experience that we have an all voluntary military. For a long time it was just understood that every male as of the age of 18 had to be prepared for the possibility of being drafted into service. But even for those who died when they had no choice in the matter – their sacrifice was no less touching.

All deaths –especially violent ones – are painful on some level. And as a response to my theological understandings of the scripture – I am preaching peace and non-violent conflict resolution. But as a realist – I know our world is not there yet. I hope we as a nation and as a global partner are working towards those goals, and I believe we are. I have great hopes that it is true – that the world is learning how to solve their differences in other ways than violence.

I want to say I am very grateful for all who serve the world through their military serve. And I didn’t say “serving our country” because I believe that in the end – our military has to serve the greater needs in all areas of the globe where we are based. By serving the world – we serve our country best. That is the calling of the only Superpower left in the world - to be advocates for the weaker countries.

The Disciples had trusted Jesus and followed him – and he ‘left them’ once – he left them orphaned and alone – and yet he returned to them – in such an amazing way – glorious! And yet, he did have to leave this earth – it is a law of physics that God put into place. Bodies do not last. Next Sunday is Ascension Sunday so we will contemplate that next week – but now we focus on the promise that Jesus made. He was reassuring his followers in advance that they will never be alone – they will never be without his comfort – his protection – his wisdom – NEVER! And to make sure of that he tells them of the Paraclete – this mystical level of awareness and being inside those who trust and believe in Jesus Christ.

I believe the “legend of Jesus” would have remained just that – a myth – a story – a fable – had it not been for the eternal awareness of Jesus given to humanity through this gift of the Spirit – which communicates with us on levels we can never be fully aware of.

We take comfort in this just as those who knew the lines of Jesus’ face did.

The truth is in the spirit – in the son – in the father – and in us all – and we are called to go and do likewise.
Amen