

The Sending of the Advocate!

Text: John 14:15-21

Sermon for Mission Awareness Sunday

The Passover festival is about to begin. Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem. They are staying in a home, reclining on pillows around a table. Jesus knows he does not have a lot of time. His mission on earth is about to come to an end. His work is to be passed on to his closest friends. Jesus wants to ensure that his disciples are as prepared as they can be to carry on the mission. To help in this preparation, Jesus makes a demand, followed by two promises.

The demand is given in today's text, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) Here, Jesus is not speaking about the Ten Commandments. Instead, he is speaking of the commandment he previously gave: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another." (John 13:24)

We wonder what must have gone through the disciples' minds as Jesus' command sunk in. If you love Jesus, you must obey his commandments because love and obedience go hand-in-hand. They may have thought to themselves or even whispered to each other, "How in the world are we going to fulfill that command? Heck, it is hard to love each other. We have not been harmonious in our own relationships? Look at how we fight amongst ourselves to see who is the greatest. Look at how we try to jostle for a position with Jesus in heaven. Is Jesus not asking a lot from us?"

What Jesus demands of them appears impossible to achieve. Then a sense of awe comes over the disciples as Jesus' words sink in and they finally get the picture. The full extent of their responsibility becomes clear. Jesus does not want them to just to keep his memory alive. They are to carry on his mission; the disciples are to be a presence within the communities they visit. Jesus knows that these words have caused some distress among his closest friends, but He is not going to abandon them. To ease the disciples' distress, Jesus promises two things that will enable them to carry out his mission.

First, Jesus promises his disciples that he is going to send them some help. The Holy Spirit will take Jesus' place. The Holy Spirit takes on many roles and

characteristics. As the disciples embark on their mission, the Holy Spirit's role will be that of an advocate. An advocate speaks on behalf of a person or group who seeks justice. Although the Spirit will not be with them in body—the Spirit will live in and work through the disciples, enabling them to do their job, acting as their advocate. Throughout the years, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, has enabled the church to carry out its mission, especially when those who were seeking justice found themselves voiceless and powerless. One story stands out about a missionary who demonstrated his love and obedience for Jesus Christ, and with the help of the Advocate stood in solidarity with Korean Christians, against the Japanese government. *(You may use this story or one that is more appropriate for your setting)*

Several years ago, Japan created a policy to have all foreigners fingerprinted, including Koreans who had lived in Japan for generations. The late Jack McIntosh, a well-known missionary with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, had been working with Korean Christians for a number of years. Jack saw that this law was prejudicial and discriminatory against Korean people so he became an advocate and a voice for them. He stood in solidarity with the people whom the government considered to be a threat. As a result a court case ensued. When Jack had the opportunity to come home to Canada on furlough, he refused to leave Japan. He knew if he left, he would not receive his re-entry permit, leaving no one to be an advocate or a voice for the people. For almost ten years the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, enabled Jack and others to carry out their tireless mission to overturn the Japanese government's policy of fingerprinting Koreans living in Japan. Although he lost the court case, in the end the government relented and dropped the law. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, continues to enable Koreans to be a Christian presence in their Japanese communities. The journey was not easy, but the Advocate was present.

The mission that the disciples were entrusted with was also not easy. Jesus knew this. His own ministry was “no piece of cake.” Jesus knew exactly what his closest friends would face. The disciples would experience tiredness and exhaustion to the point where they would wonder if they had enough strength to carry on. They would be frustrated and disappointed because people would turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to their preaching. The disciples would be challenged and criticized, accused and condemned by religious and governmental leaders because these people will find their message as uncomfortable as sitting on narrow wooden pews. There would be days when they would find themselves restless and craving

peace and quiet. To help his closest friends the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, played the role of the Comforter.

The Comforter walked with the disciples, reassuring them to not: “fear what they fear and...not be intimidated.” (1Peter 3: 14) The Comforter would not leave the disciples alone to face anyone who: “demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” (1Peter 3:15) The disciples would be given the strength and energy to do what they have been called to do—to live for God and attest to his love in the world.

It is so amazing how the Holy Spirit, in the role of Comforter, can and has transformed the lives of individual people and the church. We live in a broken and turbulent world—a world filled with so much pain and suffering. It is a world filled with so much uncertainty, hardships, intolerance, hatred, and violence. Illnesses, addiction, and abuse are on the rise. People are feeling more and more alone and isolated. It has become more difficult to keep a job because long-term employees cost companies more in salaries and benefits than new recruits. Families struggle to sustain family values. Religious fanatics turn to violence. Even churches struggle with an unknown future as they face declining attendance and financial support. In the midst of so much unrest, dissension, and strife facing our world, our communities, and our personal lives there is hope. Through the grumbles, the complaints, the anxieties, the cries, the weeping, and the whimpering, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, slips into our lives to reassure us that we are not alone in our darkness, in our state of isolation or hopelessness. *(You may use this story or one that is more appropriate for your setting)*

Cathy is worried. Her father has just died. Her mother lives in another province and is having a hard time adjusting to her new life. When Cathy phones her mother she is often depressed and crying. Cathy is torn between her own family and going to her mother. One day when Cathy phones, much to her surprise, her mother is a little bit more cheerful. She has just returned from the Group Readjustment Over Widowhood (GROW). The group is run by Emily, a committed member and organist of the local Presbyterian church. Emily, a psychologist at the Community Mental Health Centre, welcomes about 25 women at different stages of grieving. Although GROW has guest speakers like mechanics who show the women how to maintain their cars; a lawyer who speaks about legal matters; therapists who talk about the process and stages of grieving, the

healing begins when the women start to care for each other. With the presence of the Comforter working through Emily, the women reach out to each other with tears and tenderness. Their own healing begins. *(Adapted from Tears and Tenderness: The Face of Jesus, PCC, 1994).*

God has given us the gift of the Comforter so that we can experience the strength and energy of God's grace.

Jesus furnishes a second promise to his disciples. Although, Jesus will not be physically present, he does promise the disciples that he will not leave them orphaned, as they engage in his mission. The idea of being left as an orphan raises uneasy images. In Jesus' day, orphaned children were deemed a burden and were often sold into slavery. Their lives were filled with misery, which often led to early death. Unlike the orphans in their day, the disciples, who embraced Jesus' teachings, healing, and miracles would have a place in God's household. They would never be onlookers to a love that they believed they could never have. Jesus alludes to the fact that between his death and resurrection there will be those who will reject his message, and therefore will not know or recognize him. Jesus vows to make himself known to the disciples and anyone else who is prepared to obey his commandments and show his love as they engage in his mission. The Apostle Paul confirms Jesus' promise: "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'...For we too are his offspring." (Acts 17:28) When each of us engages in Christ's mission, that is, when we open ourselves and the doors of our churches to make room for every type of person in our society, are we not obeying Jesus' commandments? He is not asking us to only profess his commandments, but to put them into action. (You may use this story or one that is more appropriate to your setting.)

Morris* is not an orphan. He does have a family who lives in the apartment building next to the church. This 46-year-old mentally challenged man is often seen walking around the community. Although Morris is a Hindu, for the past year he has faithfully been coming to St. David's Presbyterian Church. Morris is from Guyana and will proudly remind us, "I'm from Guyana!" Every Sunday, when I arrive at the church, Morris is already there waiting for me. With his scruffy face and beautiful broad smile, Morris greets me, "Good morning, how are you?" or "Good morning, you are back." Morris has become very comfortable in the congregation. At a congregational pot-luck dinner Morris shared his love of his country with great enthusiasm. When our organist retired, at the

coffee hour, Morris paid him an awesome compliment: “This young man has done a good job!” The room broke into laughter because our organist was twenty years older than Morris. During the coffee hour, with no reservations or shyness, Morris moves comfortably from table to table, group to group. In the past few months Morris has certainly found his place in the family of St. David’s where he receives unconditional love and acceptance.

(*Name has been changed)

When you and I engage in Jesus’ mission, whether in our own congregation, the community, or overseas, we do so with the recognition that we have the Holy Spirit, both Advocate and Comforter, dwelling in us.

When you and I engage in Jesus’ mission, we do so confident that he will not leave us orphaned.

And when you and I engage in Jesus’ mission, we do so by not leaving others orphaned but by bringing them into God’s household!

This clearly is the way to love one another!

Thanks be to God!

The Rev. Ann Blane has served The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) as a Diaconal Minister at Flora House Inner City Mission, Winnipeg, and in Cornwall, Midland, Newmarket, and as Regional Staff for the Synod of Quebec and Eastern Ontario. After Ordination, her first pastoral charge was Centreville Presbyterian Church, South Monaghan. Ann spent the first twelve years of her life on the Bhil Field in India where her parents, Bill and Lucie Milne served as missionaries with the PCC. Presently, Ann and her husband Robert, with their two cats, Charlie and J.K. (John Knox) live in Scarborough, Ontario, where she is the minister at St. David’s Presbyterian Church.