SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

Jeannie D. Thompson

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*Spirit Unlimited* John 14:15-21

For the last few Sundays, since Easter, we have been listening to Bible passages describing the ways in which the community of apostles and believers had been gathering around Jesus’ words now that he was no longer physically among them.

This morning, we are asked to remember—the way the apostles did—what Jesus said to them to prepare them for his departure. He knew them and us so well, and so he knew how especially important it is for human beings to have the assurance that we will *never* be left alone, never left without guidance and care. Indeed, he knows that, left to ourselves, we are inclined to believe ourselves abandoned, even orphaned. He knows that human nature hates a void and will fill it with false gods of all sorts.

What this passage does is show us just how well Jesus knows us. He knew who his disciples were in their heart of hearts and so he acknowledges their feelings and promises them that he will provide a remedy for their fears. He tells them that he is going to ask God for “*another* Advocate” [16] to be sent to be with us. Moreover, Jesus says he is going to ask that this *second* Advocate be with us *forever*.

Because I believe it is of special and deep importance to understand what this meant to the first disciples, and especially what it means to us here, today, I would like to spend some time digging-into what Jesus was saying about the Holy Spirit—which, BTW, as I mentioned earlier, we will celebrate in worship two Sundays from now. This is our preparation for that. BTW, what color are you going to wear?

So, let us begin with the word that our pew bibles use for the Holy Spirit. As I just said, the word Paul (Yamamoto) just read for us is the word “Advocate.”

In Bible Study the other evening—the Zoom meeting—we decided that we did not much like the word “Advocate” because it sounded too legalistic—as though we were all on trial and needed an attorney. We also decided we did not like the word “Comforter” because it sounded too mushy.

We decided we liked the word “Counselor.”

Of course, Jesus was and is, known by all of these names. However, in reference to this Advocate, or Comforter, or Counselor—all of whom are the Holy Spirit who is to come after Jesus—it is helpful to know a bit more about the language in the original text.

First of all, although our pew Bibles translate the word as “Advocate,” the Greek word that was used is the word *paraclete*, and it is used as both a verb and as a noun. The verbs describe how the Spirit is going to function, what the Spirit is going to do in the lives of the individuals and the community.

And so, the *paraclete* is said to be the One who “urges, prods and encourages.” The *paraclete* also “comforts and consoles.” Also, the *paraclete* may be called upon for help and support. And finally, the *paraclete* calls us to action, to notice, or to be attentive to what God is doing in the world, or what wants from and for us.

As a noun, the *paraclete* takes as its essence all of these actions. That is, a “Comforter” describes both the activity of the *paraclete*, but it is also the *substance* or the character of the *paraclete.* All of these functions and these identities—this is the essence of who the *paraclete* is. What the *paraclete* does and who the *paraclete* is summed up in the word *Spirit*, or more accurately, *Holy* *Spirit*.

All of the loving, attentive, protective, and guiding activities—the very being of the Holy Spirit *is* all of these qualities. This is whom Jesus sent to be with us.

However, there is more.

As I mentioned earlier: the Holy Spirit will take up the very work and the very role in our lives that Jesus played in the life of the first people who knew him. However, there is an important difference. John, the writer of this Gospel, describes the difference in this way at the very beginning of his book, in chapter one:

*14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.*

“The Word” of God “became flesh,” became a human being known as Jesus who physically came into the world like all other human beings, who walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine and got his feet dirty, who became tired and hungry, who enjoyed the company of friends and family, who ate food and liked to drink good wine. Well, I assume he liked to drink good wine because that is all he made, really good wine.

His earthly life was ended by execution. That is: his physical life ended the way all human life ends. The Word that became flesh was not indestructible. Like all human beings, he could and did die.

Unlike us, Jesus was resurrected. The evil that killed him did not defeat him. However, he did honor his physical existence and what it means to human beings, who live a span and then die, by not remaining with us as he had been. That is: he did not continue with the disciples, and us, in the same way he had before his crucifixion. That embodiment of God’s love had completed that particular part of God’s mission.

What we can say about the Jesus who sat at table with the disciples is that in coming into the world to reveal God’s love by taking on human form, Jesus also had to complete God’s revelation by not lingering among us in the same human form.

Just as you and I do not get to rise-up out of the grave and pick up where we left off, neither did Jesus do this. He did not just get back up and go on traveling around with the disciples the way he had before. Forty days after his resurrection, after making several appearances to the disciples, Jesus ascended to be with God. He defied death and lives, but he does so at the right hand of God.

In sending Jesus to live a human life, God’s whole purpose was to demonstrate to us how precious human lives are to God, and how precious we should be to ourselves. We were shown that we are made in God’s image and blessed with gifts and skills that we may share with others. We were shown how God cherishes our life—each and every one of our lives—and that we are meant to cherish, not only our own life, but other peoples’ lives, as well.

But there is more.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit who came to take-up the work Jesus began is not confined to the limits of human life and being. God, through Jesus, limited God’s own self when God was in physical human form. However, the Holy Spirit, untethered from a human body and life span, is free to be with humankind throughout *all* the ages and epochs of human history.

But once again: there is more—much, much more. I’m beginning to sound like that Ron co fella from the infomercials aren’t I?

The sum total of what Jesus did for us in sending the Holy Spirit can be described as a deep and lasting commitment to humankind, to you and to me, to us together as the human race, and also to us as Nu’uanu Congregational Church.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit that Jesus sent does not just surround us. The Spirit does not only live in the world with us. What Jesus promises in this passage is that the love we have for him will cause the Spirit to live *within* us. Our love for God creates a home for God’s love to live in us and we will know that God’s love is in us if we love others, if our lives are guided and made strong and unafraid to love and have compassion for others—even our enemies—we can do all this with God’s love.

In sending the Holy Spirit, we are shown that Jesus knew of our needs, and made provision for them. All three persons of the Trinity—God our Mother/Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—love us and are present and active in our lives, no matter what is going on in our lives or around us in the world—even when we are feeling overwhelmed and anxious.

All three are seen most clearly in the face of Jesus, the One who never left his first disciples when they were worried. He even walked on water to come to their rescue in a storm, and his promise is to always be near when we are worried or confused or in danger.

In the passage we heard this morning, Jesus promised to remain engaged with us, giving us his truth, life and love, and he invites us to remain connected to him through the Advocate God has sent—through the Holy Spirit.

So, the question we should ask ourselves this morning is this: Of whom am I afraid? and What am I worried about?

Once we have reflected on these questions, I invite you to look up this passage again and let Jesus’ words speak directly to your heart, let them speak directly into your life. Let Jesus’ words speak to you so that you will know the peace and comfort of his love so that you may face into the world and the future with confidence.

In a couple of minutes, we will sing one of my favorite hymns, *Be Now My Vision*. As we sing this hymn, I invite you to especially allow the last verse to ring in your ears and echo in your hearts:

*Sovereign of heaven, my victory won,*

*may I reach heaven’s joys, O bright heaven’s Sun!*

*Heart of my own heart whatever befall,*

*still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*

Amen.