

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

May 17, 2020

There is a problem with today's gospel reading. Where it starts doesn't build the scene, and so, it's easy for us to lose the meaning. So, let's re-create the scene. It was the night before the Passover. Jesus had become like a servant and washed his followers' feet. Gathered at the table, Jesus told his disciples that Judas would betray him, and that Jesus would be leaving them. Jesus told the disciples that he loved them and that all his disciples should love one another. It is at that moment that Jesus consoled the disciples with a few promises. Last week, we were reminded that Jesus promised the disciples a place with him. And, today, we picked up where the conversation ended last week.

There, the disciples were still sitting in an environment of uncertainty, fear, insecurity, and confusion. Into that environment, Jesus gave another promise—a promise that Jesus would be coming to in a different form. A promise that explained the special way that Jesus would remain present with all believers. And, that special way, is with “another Advocate.” And those two words are jammed packed with depth. After all, that phrase reminds us that this was not the first one or necessarily the only one, but it is *another* one. It's something that walks like, talks like, and maybe even looks a little like the former ones. It's one that has a striking resemblance to Jesus. It's *another* one.

More specifically, it's another *advocate*. And, if you know me, you'd probably guess that I looked this word up in the original Greek language to keep our translator honest. And, the word translated here as "Advocate" is *parakleton*. The root of the word is *parakletos*, and *parakletos* has a few possible translations. We can use it as a legal term and get the translation we got today, that is "advocate," or we can go with the relational terms, and we'd get "comforter" or "helper" or "counselor." Ok, fun Greek lesson, but why does that matter. Well, here's the deal: if you're anything like me, when I hear the word "advocate" I start thinking about someone who pushes, nudges or nags on some person, system, or thing. I think about court advocates, I think about hospital advocates, and I think about educational advocates. I immediately go to thinking about how *my* case can be pled before some larger entity that is beyond my grasp. And, sure, advocates can be really great, but the thing is, I'm not sure that fits with how John's gospel understands Jesus.

After all, the famous verse that many of us might know from this gospel is John 3:16. In that verse, God so loved the world that God gave us Jesus, who is an advocate. In John, it's not so much that *we* need an advocate going to an angry God to plead, much like Moses did on behalf of the Israelites. That's not John's gospel. So, if we don't need an advocate going to God because God already loves us, then maybe, just maybe, the advocate is not *for* us but instead, the advocate is coming *to* us. Or to use Dr. David Lose's words, "perhaps it is the Spirit who intercedes on God's behalf before us."¹

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/05/easter-6-a-spirit-work/>

And, I think that just might be it. In those times when we, like the disciples, feel uncertain, in fear, unclear about the future, and feel that isolation is turning into abandonment, those are the moments when I need something or someone to come and comfort and help me (and, remember, those are some other ways to translate *parakletos*). These are the moments when I probably need an advocate to remind me of Christ's presence. These are the moments when *I need to be shown* by another advocate that walks, talks, and maybe even looks a lot like Jesus. It is in the midst of chaos, that the advocate comes to calm. It is in the midst of fear, that the advocate comes to comfort. It is in the midst of separation, that the advocate comes to show connection. And, that is Jesus's promise to the disciples, and that is Jesus's promise to you and me today.

You see, the promise of love was the message of Jesus. Love for all people. Love for all creation. Love that sacrifices. Love that does not translate to free, unfettered, uncontrolled, and individualistic actions, but rather, love that brings life to all. Love, sometimes, makes us uncomfortable. Love that is shown by *another* advocate. That advocate is found in the love shown when we acknowledge the sacrifices that we all make for the new life that is given to all of God's beloved children. The advocate is found in the love shown in supporting local businesses and non-profits. The advocate is glimpsed in the love shown in patience with children, partners, and friends in our quarantine cohorts.

And, so, there it is. Today's gospel reveals Christ's on-going and never-ending presence. Jesus assures us that he came to bring a message that advocates *to* us regarding God's love that is freely given. And, while Jesus may not physically be here, through the resurrection, Jesus sent another advocate, another comforter, and another helper. Christ has sent us the Spirit of love that reminds us each day of God's presence. For, love is another advocate. Love is God's gift. Love is our resurrection. Amen.