

Sermon May 17, 2020

Jose (Pepe) Demarest

Easter wk 6,

John 14:15-21

Brothers and Sisters although we are still separated physically, the Word of God still speaks to us individually and as a community. Today was the day we had hoped to worship together as in person at CtK, but as disappointing as it is to still have to meet digitally, the Advocate, The Holy Spirit, continues to unite as the Body of Christ.

Today's reading takes up the "Final Discourse" in John's gospel. This discourse is Jesus' Pep-talk to a confused group of followers. They had just celebrated Passover with him. He had compared his body to bread and wine, he'd washed *their* feet, talked about being betrayed and denied, all the while talking about how he was not going to be with them long, *but* he wasn't going completely either. This had to have been confusing for them because it was *before* the crucifixion, *before* the resurrection, *before* the road to Emmaus, *before* the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Before** the reality of his death was known to them.

It would be like if someone a few months ago started talking to us about masks, and toilet paper shortages, about job losses, social distancing, about care facilities

being locked up, about not being able to visit our loved ones, *before* the reality of Covid19 hit America.

Both of these events, Jesus' death and Covid19 have been chaos provoking, faith shaking, major life disruptions. For the disciples, the public execution of their leader by an oppressive occupying force. A leader they had hoped would bring about a new autonomy- a new Jerusalem.

For us modern disciples, this forced isolation has changed our ideas about what community means. It has opened our eyes to how *essential* essential workers are. It has brought a new understanding what being one body of Christ means. But it has also brought a realization that the normal we hope to go back to may not be possible- at least not the Way things were.

So to both of these realities, Jesus' Final discourse may speak words of truth and words of hope and words of promise both they and we need to hear.

The truth was hard for me to hear in this Gospel Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." This has always been a hard for me to hear, if you cared about your stuff, you'd put it away, if you tried harder, you'd do better, if you wanted to, you could quit drinking...the problem for me is that sometimes I cant do the second part of the statements, ..sometimes I can't put my stuff away,

I can't try harder... I couldn't quit drinking. It's not that I didn't want to...I just couldn't. And I wonder if the disciples felt the same. Wanting to be holy, to keep the commandments, but somehow not being able to. Jesus says, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." I love Jesus, but I can't always keep his commandments.

So then I ask myself what are his commandments? Is it just the ten commandments or is it something else? Earlier in this "final discourse", Jesus gives them a new commandment to "Love one another, as I have loved you". Loving one another seems easy until I watch the news, and people do things I disagree with. I think about how this isolation is making me aware not only of my shortcomings but those I spend all my time with...yes of course I love them but sometimes we get on each other's nerves. Dr. Caroline Lewis, one of my professors at Luther when discussing this final discourse, mentioned that Jesus was washing the feet of **all** of his disciples. He told them to love one another as he had loved them and that included Judas who would betray him and Peter who would deny him. So loving those close to us is not always easy. Keeping God's commandments is rarely easy, it may be impossible without help.

Martin Luther talks about How he couldn't of his own power be good enough to get to Heaven. He needed help, he needed Grace. So there is a word of truth. The disciples and we need help to keep God's commandments.

After Jesus says if you love me you will keep my commandments, he goes on to say he will ask the Father for "Another Advocate" that's critical. This is where the hope lives.

Jesus has ben their advocate, the one who walks alongside them, encouraging, challenging them. But, as he tells his disciples he is going away, he goes on to say he will ask God to send the spirit. That spirit ensures they will continue to have a relationship.

This discourse talks so much about relationships -Father/son...not being left orphaned...love and indwelling. The disciples whom Jesus earlier called friends were being warned that Jesus was going away, but they are given a hope - "Another Advocate" would come to dwell in them/ God would be helping them to keep the commandments -to love each other, to serve the world.. The God who is faithful promises to be with them. So there is the promise—"I will not leave you orphaned." That must have been a trying time for them- a time of

chaos Was Jesus the messiah or not? For many today, this is a trying time, a time of chaos. Will our lives ever be normal again?

It's important to remember that the Spirit, the advocate that Jesus promised is the same Spirit who breathed over the waters. The same Spirit who blew over the chaos to start creation. The same Spirit given to us in baptism.

Today we will celebrate Holy communion again. We remember that this gift that Jesus gave us is also words of truth, a hope and a promise. The truth of the forgiveness of our sins. The hope of being one body in Christ. And the promise that our God is with us in the everydayness of our lives.

This Spirit gave the first disciples the courage to start the early church. Courage that was so necessary in a hostile environment. This same Spirit will be with us as we navigate what the church will be like after Covid19. It may not be the normal church we expect, but with the Spirit's guidance it can become Christ's beloved community.

Jesus in this Final Discourse offers truth, hope and a promise to the anxious disciples. This promise is our hope as well. The Spirit will be with us- speaking for us, encouraging us, walking with us as we await the new creation that will come

from this chaos.