

What the Other Judas Asked

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Crozet United Methodist Church

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John 14:23-29

*Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.*

*"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.*

I can remember being young when a holiday was approaching that required me to purchase a gift for one of my parents; especially Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Christmas. By a certain age, it became a Big Deal for my brother Michael and I to choose the gift ourselves with no intervention from our parents. We were afraid that they would somehow discover what the gift was prior to receiving it, and besides, we were big boys, and therefore did not need one of our parents hovering over us and telling us what to do.

Of course, the great obstacle to our desire for a perfect balance of self-reliance, freedom, and control, was the fact that we were nowhere near old enough to drive. Therefore, we had to contend with at least one snoop parent, usually our father, in the store at the same time as us. Michael and I would be there in the Best Products store, huddled around the treasure we just *knew* would make Mom's life complete, imagining the complete and utter surprise on Mom's face when she opened the gift box containing the foam slippers, while also imagining how this joyous moment would be diminished if she had even an inkling of what was to come.

However, what would happen at least a dozen times during our shopping/covert reconnaissance mission was we would look up from our treasure and see Dad peeking down the aisle at us. We of course would protest ("DAD!") and he would pretend like he had not heard us, that he just happened to be passing by our aisle, perhaps looking for some ladies' footwear for himself, that he had not seen anything, that it was all a huge coincidence, and he would then disappear for at least three minutes, when the cycle would repeat itself again.

I am a father myself now, and when we go shopping, I (obviously) do not let my nineteen-month-old out of my sight. Yet, I am finally at a point where I will let me eight-year-old

out of my sight. A little bit, but not for long, and not out of earshot. I also keep checking in on her, no less often than every two to three minutes. I want her to learn some independence, but not too much. Not yet. Not now. I'm the daddy, and it is my job to be protecting, loving, and close.

This morning's text is found in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. It begins a section of the Fourth Gospel known as the Farewell Discourse, which is nearly five chapters of Jesus explaining to his disciples that he must leave them, that he must die, that things in their relationship with him are about to dramatically change.

The Farewell Discourse presents some of Jesus' best known and most loved sayings, sayings that are particularly commonly used in services of death and resurrection. It is here that Jesus tells his disciples that "in his Father's house, there are many rooms," and that he is "the way, the truth, and the life. Here is where he tells them that "he is the vine, and the disciples are the branches, and here is where he prays for his disciples, and prays for all believers.

This morning's text is quite early in the Farewell Discourse, and it is were Jesus promises his disciples that he is departing, but not leaving them alone, for God is sending them an Advocate, or what some translations call a "Counselor," the Holy Spirit, whose responsibility it will be to teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus has said to them. He then gives them his peace, and says those familiar words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

The title for the Holy Spirit, translated here as Advocate, Counselor, comfortor, or instructor comes from the Greek word Parakletos or Paraclete. Its literal meaning is "to call alongside." As Jesus prepares these close friends for his departure, he does so in a way that promises them that one will come in his name to teach and remind them of all they have said and done together. If you can imagine, here we find Jesus faced with the daunting task of explaining the person and work of the Holy Spirit to his disciples who so often struggled to get things right, Jesus simply tells them what their experience of the Holy Spirit will be *like*: it will be like having me with you, with you learning and remembering, as you show your love for me by living as I have taught you to live.

Today, we invoke the name and work of the Holy Spirit so often that we often forget the power and the promise in that name. When I was ordained, I knelt and the bishop lay his hands upon my head and said "Lord, pour upon Joseph Douglas Forrester the Holy Spirit for the office and work of an elder, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," and when I stood up, I did so as someone who was to be a spiritual leader in my community, wherever that community might be. I was now Reverend Forrester, and it was dizzying. The task seemed to hard, if not impossible.

When we baptize babies, the child's parents hand the baby to me, and after I administer the water, we lay hands upon the child and pray "May the Holy Spirit work within you, that being born of water and the Spirit, you may be a true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ," and when I hand the child back to his or her parents, I am handing a member of the household of God

to parents who have just promised before witnesses that they will model for this child what it means to live and believe as a disciple of Jesus Christ, knowing that at times, the task will seem impossible.

When a person or persons unite as members with this congregation, I pray that “The God of all grace, who has called us to eternal glory in Christ, establish you and strengthen you by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you may live in grace and peace,” knowing that at times, living in grace *or* peace will be hard enough, and living in grace *and* peace will seem impossible.

When we gather at the Lord’s table to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, the pastor prays over the bread and grape juice, “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, so that we may be the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood,” and we all say “Amen,” knowing that there will be days when living as a redeemed people who God has formed into the body of Christ will seem impossible.

When we gather together for a service of Holy Matrimony, just before the bride and groom take their vows, the pastor prays, “Bless and sanctify with your Holy Spirit, they who come together to join in marriage,” and the people say “Amen,” knowing that there will be times when they seem anything but sanctified to one another, and even this prayer itself will seem impossible.

For all of the talk of the Christian faith being a crutch for non-thinking, delusional, irrational, weak-minded people, through all of the promises we make, none of them are easy. In fact, they are all pretty hard, if we take them seriously, and downright impossible if we try to live them alone.

Yet the promise of this text is that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not have to ever live this life alone, because God is with us, in the person and work of the Holy Spirit who God has given to us; the Holy Spirit, who advocates for us, who counsels us, who comforts us. The Christian life is seldom easy, but it is never impossible, unless we try to imagine living this life alone.

We all have times in our lives when we feel like God has deserted us, when we feel like God is profoundly absent from our lives. I believe the disciples certainly experienced this after the death of Christ, otherwise, why would they have gone back to fishing? We have days when it all, all of this faith stuff, seems like at once like a noble idea and a distant dream. But then, sometimes when we least expect it, when we *remember*.

The words to a hymn we have heard a hundred times suddenly seem to be speaking directly to you, or a passage of scripture suddenly seems to be addressing your particular situation, or a thought enters your mind out of nowhere that enables you to somehow see God in the midst of your life in a whole new way, or someone, perhaps out of nowhere, tells you exactly the words you needed to hear at that moment or you reach a crossroads in your life and you feel a tug that you cannot explain leading you down a road that may even seem like the hard way, yet it

somehow just feels right. That is the power of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who is the fulfillment of the promise of Christ to help us both understand and remember that our Lord has promised to us to be with us, and to never leave us as orphans all alone.

To have those periods in our lives when it all seems to hard, when belief is a chore, and discipleship seems impossible is normal. It is part of living as a people who have a foot in two worlds at once. Yet God's word teaches us, promises us, and experience validates for us, that sometimes when we think we are all alone, the Advocate, the Counselor, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit really is watching over us, peeking around the corner, at the end of the aisle, sometimes even invisibly guiding us in the ways that are right, and keeping the memory of God's great good news ever before us, empowering us to love God, and live a life of showing the world God's love by keeping Christ's commandments. It isn't always easy, but we are never alone. Thanks be to God.

Gloria In Excelsis Deo.