

It is the night before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. There must have been a lot of tension and confusion and grief in that upper room that night. The Teacher is meeting with his disciples for one final meal. It is the Passover meal and Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, an action of humble service.

This is the contextual setting of the Gospel reading last week and today. In fact we pick up where we had left off last Sunday. Jesus says, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you."*

Jesus is making a promise to his disciples and to us. You have an advocate! Someone who is looking out for you. Someone who is on your side. Someone who encourages you and supports you. Someone who speaks up for you and is willing to hang in there with you through thick and thin.

Think about what it feels like to hear that (take it in, the full import of what this means) someone has your back, that someone is invested in your future, that someone will not give up on you...no matter what.

It feels good; it feels like a relief, especially when you feel like your back is up against the wall. It feels empowering; when someone is with you and for you, you can take risks, you can try things you didn't think you could try, not because you won't ever fail, but because failure won't destroy you when you've got this kind of support. You can try, and try again because you have an advocate.

I realize that today is Mother's Day and expect that many of us are thinking about our Mom. Moms have a tendency to be advocates for their children so most of us have already experienced what it feels like to have and advocate. How much more to have a divine advocate; it's *the* Advocate with a capital "A", the Holy Spirit. More than that, this isn't the first Advocate, but the second. The first was Jesus. Jesus was and is your Advocate, and when he is about to leave his disciples, knowing how hard the path set before them would be, he promises to send another Advocate – someone who will love them as much as he did.

Think again how good, comforting, and empowering it feels to know that you have an Advocate.

There is so much that weighs on our souls these days especially the hardening of cultural and political lines in our country to the point people are incredibly lonely and isolated. We've all heard of families who have a difficult time sitting at the same table and listening to one another on certain topics. I think a big part of that problem is that people are so afraid. It's hard to be generous and brave and compassionate when you're afraid, or feel like no one hears you, or suspect that no one is looking out for you. There is an huge number of people who feel not heard, left behind, marginalized.

We can begin to address that fear and isolation from what we've heard in the Gospel. Here's what I know – and what God knows: many feel abandoned and orphaned; all of us feel that way from time to time. God is with you, right here, right now. God came in Christ in order that we might see what God wants for us – all of us – health and healing and community and blessing and more. Saint John the Evangelist sums up God's desire for us as *abundant life*.

God came in Christ and lived and offered this abundant life even when it upset those who wanted to control life, even when it cost Jesus *his* life. God came in Christ and was willing to suffer and die on the cross in order that we might know just how much God loves us and just how far God is willing to go to show us God's profound love.

And that wasn't enough. So God also raised Jesus from the dead to show us that nothing – not even death itself – can keep God from loving us and redeeming the whole world.

And that still wasn't enough. So God continues to come in the Holy Spirit in order to encourage us and look out for us and care for us and stay with us and walk along side of us. God comes in the Holy Spirit to be like Christ for us, every day. God comes in the Holy Spirit to be another Advocate, *our Advocate*, who will not give up on us, ever.

*The Rev. Paul Briggs
St. Thomas' Church, Camden
The 6th Sunday of Easter, 14 May 2023*