

5.14.2023 Easter 5

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 17:22-34; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

“He abides with you”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

One of the great themes of John’s gospel is God’s mission of love to this world. The Father sends the Son, Jesus, in whom we see God’s love for this world. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit from the Father, and Jesus sends his church into the world as a sign of God’s love. The motivation for God’s mission is God’s love for this world, announced in John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.”*

God’s love for this world is always active, and God calls us to be active in God’s mission to the world. This active love of God is always going ever outward. At Easter, we heard how Jesus appeared to his disciples in a closed room, saying, *“Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you”* (John 20:21). To be sent out is at the heart of God’s mission to the world.

In today’s gospel, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, *“another Advocate,”* meaning that the Holy Spirit will continue and advance Jesus’ work by abiding with his church. Jesus calls the Advocate the *“Spirit of truth,”* meaning that the church is to continually proclaim of the truth of God’s life and love for this world. Too often Christians have proclaimed judgement upon their enemies, rather than proclaiming forgiveness and love to the world. Christ sent the Spirit to lead the church not into partnership with imperial or nationalist ideologies or into colonial expansion, but to assure the world of God’s love for all people. Jesus announces his reconciling work, *“In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have overcome the world!”* (John 16:33).

The word translated as “Advocate” in today’s gospel is also known by its Greek pronunciation, “Paraclete” (παράκλητος). The word Paraclete has two shades of meaning: the first means “advocate,” and the second, “comforter.” The Holy Spirit is both an advocate and defender of the weak, as well as the Comforter who stands with the weak in the world. We must never forget that we are given the Holy Spirit to advocate for and defend the weak, the poor, the sick, the hungry and the stranger. The comforter helps all of us in the midst of a world that often treats those who are different, weak, or strangers with scorn or indifference.

Jesus promises to send *“another Advocate,”* the Holy Spirit, who will continue Jesus’ work of love through his body, the church. Jesus sends each of us out into the world to be active in God’s

mission of love for this world. We are to be advocates and comforters for those in need. This is what we do through St. Mark's ministries of compassion: the Soup Kitchen, Social Ministries, Kairos, and Stephen Ministry – all signs of God's love.

The Holy Spirit is sent to us with grace and forgiveness, so that we also might comfort others with grace and forgiveness. The Spirit of truth shows us the truth about ourselves and this world. We are sinful people in need of grace, and we are forgiven so that we might speak and act with truth about this world. We are to be defenders and comforters of the weak, the hungry, the sick and dying, the prisoner, and the stranger. Everything about God's mission to the world is about revealing God's love for all people in this world.

The New Testament is filled with examples of people who, led by the Holy Spirit, witnessed to others. In John's gospel, the Samaritan woman became a missionary returning to her community and telling everyone what Jesus had done for her. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, was led out of darkness into light, beginning the journey toward discipleship by helping bury and honor Jesus. Peter, who had denied Jesus, was forgiven and sent out into the world as a shepherd, to tend, feed and lead people to Christ. John's gospel is about a God who sends people out in God's mission of love to this world.

For over two thousand years, the Holy Spirit has been sending people in God's mission of love. Some may be sent across the world, learning new languages and living among people they come to call their own. Others may be sent across the street out into their own community to love, defend and comfort others. Wherever it is, the Spirit of truth leads people to speak truth to power about defending the weak and those whom the world hates or seeks to exclude. The church is always sent out as a sign of God's love. This is what each of us are involved in as God uses our gifts as individuals in our workplace, family, community, and together as a church, to reassure the world of God's love for all people.

The reading from Acts today is a great example of how Paul, a man who once sided with the world in persecuting Christ, was forgiven by him, and became a missionary of God's love for this world. In Paul, we see that the Advocate – the Spirit of truth – has the power to change and forgive us by abiding in us.

Paul was sent out to other nations and people to speak of God's love for this world, dialoguing with culture, and seeking to transform the world with Christ. In Athens, Paul quoted Greek writers and these words have become a vital part of the New Testament. Paul said, "*Indeed he is not far*

*from each one of us. For 'In him we live and love and have our being.'*” Paul was seeking to inculcate the gospel, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak through him, sinking the roots of God’s love into language and culture. Like Paul, your words also have the power to transform the world with God’s love.

Like Paul, the Holy Spirit sends all of us into the world every single day to be advocates, defenders, and comforters of the weak and those in need. He abides in you so that you might speak in this culture transforming the world with God’s love. He abides in you so that you might speak God’s truth to the powers of this world that seek to deny the rights of others, that wage war upon their neighbors, that exclude the stranger and those who are seen as different. He abides in you so that you might reveal Jesus who is *“the way, and the truth, and the life,”* the dynamic power of God’s Spirit alive in this world. The Spirit of truth will abide in you with power to transform the world with the love of God.

This means God’s sending of the church is always incarnational because God abides in each of us. This means your life has meaning in God’s mission to the world. Every chapter of your life has a theme – the work that you are being called to do for Christ.

Today’s reading from 1 Peter tells us not to fear or be intimidated by the world. Peter writes, *“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.”*

He abides in you. Trust him; turn to him in prayer; know that he will act through you each day. Be an advocate for and defender of those in need, the weak, the hungry, the stranger, the outsider. Comfort them in a hostile world.

He abides with you, so that you can abide with, defend and comfort your neighbor. Amen.