

<sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep<sup>[a]</sup> my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,<sup>[b]</sup> to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>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<sup>[c]</sup> you.

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

### ***“A Promise Kept”***

*“It was the Summer Olympics in Barcelona 1992 and Derek Redmond was aching for a medal. He was a young British runner who had sky rocketed to fame, shattering records in his country at age 19, but he’d had to withdraw from the 1988 Olympics due to a tendon injury which required 5 surgeries to repair. On the day of the 400-meter race in Barcelona, 65,000 fans streamed into the stadium, anxious to witness the most thrilling event that Derrek was in. High in the stands was Derek’s father, Jim, a faithful witness to every one of his son’s competitions. The race began. Derek broke through the pack to seize the lead. “Keep it up, keep it up,” his father said to himself. Heading down the backstretch, only 175 meters from the finish line, Derek was a shoo-in to win this semifinal heat. But then Derek heard a pop. It was his right hamstring. He pulled up lame, looking as if he’d been shot. His leg quivering, Derek began to hop on the other leg, and then, he fell to the track. Medical personnel ran toward him as he lay there, holding his right leg in agony. At the same moment, Jim, seeing his son in trouble, began to race down from the top row of the stands, pushing toward the track, sidestepping some people, bumping into others. All he could think about was getting to his son, to help him. He wasn’t going to be stopped by anyone. On the track, Derek had realized that his dream of an Olympic medal was gone. The other runners streaked past him and across the finish line. He was a lonely figure laying there, friendless, parentless. Tears poured down his face, and all he could think was, “I don’t want to take a DNF, a Did-Not-Finish.” When the medical crew arrived with a stretcher, Derek told them, “No, there’s no way I’m getting on that stretcher. I’m going to finish my race.” And so, he lifted himself to his feet, ever so slowly and carefully, and he started hobbling down the track. Suddenly, the crowd realized that Derek wasn’t dropping out of the race. He was actually continuing on one leg, in a fiercely determined effort to make it to the finish line. One painful step at a time, each one a little slower and more agonizing than the one before. The crowd began to cheer for him. The fans rose to their feet and their cries grow louder and louder, building into a thundering roar. At that moment, Jim reached the bottom of the stands, vaulted over the railing, dodged a security guard, and ran to his son — with two security people running after him. “That’s my son out*

*there,” he yelled back at them “and I’m going to help him.” Jim reached Derek at the final curve, about 120 meters from the finish line, and wrapped his arm around his waist. “I’m here, son,” Jim said gently. “Lean on me. We’ll finish together.” Derek put his arms around his father’s shoulders and sobbed. Together, arm in arm, father and son struggled toward the finish line with 65,000 people cheering, clapping and crying. Just a few steps from the end Jim released the grip he had on his son so that Derek could cross the finish line by himself. “I’m the proudest father alive,” Jim Redmond told the press afterward, with tears in his eyes. ‘I’m prouder of him than I would have been if he had won the gold medal.’ Together, we kept a promise we’d made to finish the race, no matter what.”<sup>1</sup>*

Well, this story may remind us a bit of the promise made by Jesus to his disciples during his “Farewell Discourse”, that last conversation with them before his crucifixion as recorded in John 14. *Fred Craddock captures the scene well. He likens the disciples to children playing on the floor, who happen to look up and see their parents putting on coats and hats. “Their questions are three”, he says. “Where are you going? Can we go? Then who is going to stay with us?”<sup>2</sup>*

In answering their first two questions, “Where are you going?” and “Can we go?”, we noted last week that Jesus told them he was going to his Father’s house to prepare a place for them, the path to it was himself, for he was “the way, the truth and the life”, and he told them that indeed they would someday come too...in fact, he would come to take them to himself. But to the third question, “Then who is going to stay with us?”, to this question, in this week’s text, we note that he responded with a promise...a promise that even though he was leaving them, he would not leave them orphaned. He would not leave them parentless. He would ask the Father to send them ANOTHER advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with them.

This Advocate would be two things: first, the Advocate would be like Jesus for Jesus was the first. This advocate would dwell with them, just as Jesus, the Word made flesh, had dwelt

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/printer\\_friendly\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id+93000062](https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/printer_friendly_installment.asp?installment_id+93000062) (accessed 5-12-1=20).

<sup>2</sup> Fred B. Craddock. John Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox; 1982), 98, as quoted by Elizabeth Lovell Milford, Sermon, “The God We Know” <https://www.heritagepres.com/sundays-sermon-the-god-we-know/> (accessed 5-12-20).

with them. He would, in a very real way, mediate Jesus' presence. Second, the Advocate would be one who would keep them on track because he was the "Spirit of truth". He would stand up for them when they needed it, speak on their behalf, lend them a helping hand, take their side, strengthen them, and most importantly, not leave them when they were down.<sup>3</sup> In Greek, the word for Advocate is *parakletos*, or paraclete, meaning one who comes alongside! So even after his death, Jesus promised his disciples that he would still be with them, via the advocate, he would come alongside them. They would not run this race alone.

Now....I can't but think that the disciples must have been confused when they heard these words. They could see Jesus. He was sitting at the table with them. They could feel his touch when he bent down to wash their feet. They could hear his words as he talked to them. How would they be able to see or feel or hear this strange Advocate that he talked of? How could they believe they would not be orphaned when Jesus left them?

How can we believe...siting a long way from that table where Jesus sat with his disciples? For if Jesus' words are true, then this same Spirit was not limited to them. The Holy Spirit is also our Advocate, that is, the promise is good also for us in whatever abandonment we experience...and we do experience these times.<sup>4</sup> How are we to see or feel or hear the Holy Spirit? It is not always so clear and easy. In fact, in his book, "*A Rumor of Angels*", sociologist Peter Berger tells of a priest who was working in the slums of a European city. When asked, "*Why do you do this?*", he answered, "*So that the rumor of God may not disappear completely.*"<sup>5</sup>

As I read her commentary, Barbara Lundblad reminded me this week of a metaphor which was taught by one of the ancient Christian teachers which is helpful. God can be thought of as the sun, the source of all light and life; Jesus as the beam of that same light streaming toward earth; and the Spirit as the point of light that actually arrives and touches the earth with warmth

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<sup>3</sup> David Lose. "What the Holy Spirit Really Looks Like". [www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1573](http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1573). (accessed 5-17-20).

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Lundblad. "I will not leave you orphaned". [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002527/i\\_will\\_not-leave-you-orphaned](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002527/i_will_not-leave-you-orphaned). (accessed 5/13/20).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Berger. "*Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*" (Garden City, NY :DoubleDay;1970), 95.

and energy. The presence of the Spirit in our lives might then be felt as a warmth of God surrounding and filling us, comforting us with an assurance that we are not alone.<sup>6</sup>

That is a helpful analogy, I think. But you know, the best way that we know that the spirit is with us, that we have not been abandoned, which is btw a most primal fear, is given us by Jesus himself in the Scripture. Jesus said to the disciples, “*You know him [the Advocate], because he abides with you, and he will be in you*” And then later he said, “*those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.*”

*Many years ago now, I had an experience at work...I don't remember at this point what specifically had gone wrong, but I was the Interim Director of a Hospital Pharmacy at the time, a great job when things went well, but like so many management positions, pretty isolating when things didn't. And it was one of those times. I was feeling betrayed, very lost and alone. I remember shutting the door to my office, turning off the lights and pulling the blinds. I sat there in the semi-dark, fighting back tears and asking audibly, “where ARE you, God?” After a long time of hearing nothing but my heartbeat and the sounds of the Pharmacy, I began to feel this very strong urge to take a walk, which I did. I found myself walking the hallways of the hospital, ending up in my old stomping ground, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. I'm a clinical pharmacist, you see. There I saw the familiar sights, worried moms and dads rocking their tiny little babies or standing aside their incubators, peering in. I saw nurses doing what they do, helping these precious children fight to live, and I began to regain my perspective. Light began to dawn in me once more and my problems started to shrink. Compassion filled my heart and the fog cleared as to my purpose. I was first and foremost to be caring for children, and their caregivers. All else was simply an obstacle that needed to be dealt with but not elevated as the focus. I remember going back to my office, feeling like I/we could begin again.*

Looking back on it I think I saw the Advocate that day...even if I could not feel him in me, I saw him as I'd seen, as I'd known him lots of times before in the love being poured out by the

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Lundblad.

nurses and parents. Anytime someone acts like Jesus...anytime you, or I, anyone bears the love of Christ to and comes alongside another, we are witness to the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> And that witness strengthens us. It affirms that we're not in this alone and that Jesus is keeping his promise. When we get that difficult diagnosis, when our home is destroyed by fire or flood, when we are once again rejected for the job, when we are harassed by the bully on the playground or cowering from the storm, or the monsters or the abusive parent or spouse, when we realize our children will go without food again today, when we are standing at the edge of our loved one's grave or enduring the long days of a global pandemic...when we are in any of these times and places, the Spirit of the one, who conquered death, who has defeated the powers of darkness, who loves us so much to have gone ahead to prepare a place for us, will not abandon us. He will not leave us orphaned. *"I'm here,"* says Jesus, *"Lean on me. We'll finish this race together, no matter what."* Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> David Lose