

The Advocate

“Jesus said, ‘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.’”

I believe that God is always drawing arrows that point us toward the gift of God’s grace and peace. But more than that, as if that were not enough, in the life and death and rising again of Jesus, we actually have *the* arrow that points us directly to the heart and soul of God and to the treasure of God’s limitless love for the world and us.

In Jesus we see what it means to abide with God, to be in close relationship with God. We see what it looks like, as I said in last Sunday’s sermon, when our wills and actions are so intertwined with God’s purposes that we can easily give up the stubbornness, anger, fear, pain or pride that trips us up as we try to love one another as Jesus commanded.

As Jesus says farewell and promises the Holy Spirit, he is promising that they will not be left alone without inspiration (literally, God’s breath to guide them). Still they are dismayed and confused, and so what we will hear on Sunday is more of the answer to their question as to how they will follow him when he is no longer with them.

He draws the arrow that is meant to point them to the road ahead. His words are meant to reassure all who hear them, including us, that Jesus has given all who desire follow him what they need to know, and that new truths will continue to be revealed through the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

And when we read just a little further ahead, we hear how the Peace of God is another gift Jesus gives to us. The peace of God and the coming of the Holy Spirit are linked. Giving ourselves over to the Holy Spirit is how we claim the peace that passes all understanding. Jesus’ community has always been a fragile one; his followers, even in the best of times, usually fail to understand who he is, what his mission is and what it means to abide in him.

They are about to hit a steep learning curve where they realize that following him is not just walking around behind him and showing up when he is acting to heal or restore. They, just like us, are learning that following him means to love as he loves, forgive as he forgives, heal as he heals, reconcile as he reconciles.

Following Jesus and trusting in the Holy Spirit means moving out beyond our small conceptions, our small superstitious fears and even our real and justified fears, and expanding our hearts and minds so that love can inspire and compel us into greater things.

But how do we know if we are in touch with the Holy Spirit; that we are being given new wisdom and guidance through the Advocate? Paul gives us a clue to that in a letter he wrote to the Galatians. He was very frustrated with them and he gives us that great line, “Oh you foolish Galatians!” In the face of their reluctance to trust God and move out of fearfulness he tells them, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

It is the same now. We can measure our lives and decisions as people and a community by how we reflect and embody these qualities.

God's peace and hope is present in every place, at every moment, even now during this pandemic. It is only our perception that gets clouded. Whatever we do to increase awareness of this reality is a courageous decision to take part in God's never-ending love for the world. The peace of God is an astounding thing. This peace is not the mere absence of conflict; this peace is the understanding that no matter how bad things may look or feel that God can always bring joy out of pain and new life out of death.

This peace comes by remembering all that Jesus taught us and teaches us still.

This peace can allow the Holy Spirit to catch our hearts on fire with totally unselfish love when we follow Jesus into the places of forgiveness, healing, and loving the unlovable by tearing down the walls that separate us from one another by race, creed, gender, enmity, or political divisions.

This Peace is so strengthening, and so life-giving that nothing can shake it; it's always there should we choose to claim it as our foundation.

When we learn to trust this peace, the Holy Spirit can guide us into fulfilling Jesus' commandment to love, and I promise, our lives are forever changed for the better.

Our hearts will get broken more often, our pride will get pummeled, the suffering of others will haunt us, and our need to be right will suffer a horrible death, but our joy, gentleness, gratitude and generosity will utterly explode into bright vibrant life.

This is the Easter promise. Jesus stands before us and says the way forward is always found in trusting in God's peace, hope, and grace; joy and resurrection *will* follow death.

Grace and Peace,

Stephanie+