

John 14:15-21
St. Andrew's, Nogales

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“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.”

Jesus does not leave his disciples with hope that in some distant future when he will come to them again. No, he leaves them with the hope of continuing to know him all along, without a break in time, even though he will not be physically in their presence any more. He reminds them “On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

How does he explain his coming to them at this last supper when it is clear to them that he is leaving them? Linda Clader, professor of homiletics at my seminary, CDSP, points out that the key word in this passage is a tiny word with only two letters. Can you guess what word it is?

(Guesses)

Oh, I forgot to warn you there was a pop quiz. Let's try this again.

Jesus uses this word three times in this one sentence: “on that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

Do you know what word it is now?

(Guesses)

The word is in. The Father, Jesus and Jesus' followers, and that includes us today, are all 'in' each other. All are connected in a very deep way.

The key to the connections is the Spirit of truth, the Advocate, who will abide in us. The Greek word used is Paraclete, which basically means “one

who has been called to our side”, to stand up for us, to represent us to the court.

But as Linda Clader points out, “Jesus calls the Spirit *another* Advocate. The earlier Advocate is Jesus himself.”

If we think of Jesus as the Advocate how do we perceive him? What was his ministry like? We remember that he fed the hungry, cured the sick, touched the lepers, treated women with respect, treated outcasts as human beings. He gathered many disciples, spoke to huge crowds, and he taught, and he taught, and he taught, wherever two or three or hundreds or thousands were gathered.

As a teacher Jesus was almost always among groups of people, although he did take breaks to go off by himself and pray.

And on that last day of his life on earth, when he stood as a prisoner before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him “What is truth?” Jesus, the great teacher, gave no verbal answer. He just stood there. Why didn’t he answer? Because he himself, in his life and teaching, is the answer.

“Watch him,” says Clader. “and you will find out what truth is.” (1)

Remember our story of creation? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” According to our tradition the Spirit was present in the very beginning of creation. So the spirit connects God and creation and Jesus and the disciples and us also.

But notice something else, Jesus didn’t come to us just as individuals, he came to us as community.

Note that the Greek phrase for “in you” can also be translated ‘among you’.

Let us listen again: “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I among you.” How does this other translation change our perception of his statement?

The love that Jesus commands us to love is not just about a personal feeling. It is about living out that love, keeping his commandments, not just to love but to serve one another.

That is where we will find the Spirit of truth, among those living as Jesus did.

That Jesus came to save us from our sins is commonly understood. But that 'us' is both 'us' as individuals and 'us' as communities. Both are important. But in the late 20th and now in the early 21st century much of Christianity in this country has focused mostly on individual sins and individual salvation, to the detriment of understanding our need for salvation as communities.

The result of focusing on individual salvation leads many Christians to pay attention only to individual sins and judging who's in and who's out, who's been saved and who hasn't. But our deeper tradition teaches us it is not ours to judge, that judgment is in God's hands.

By focusing so much on individual sins and salvation, we overlook our communal and corporate ways of mistreating the least among us and of desecrating God's creation, this fragile earth, our island home.

In what ways are we called to repentance as communities? In what ways are we called to repentance as corporate entities?

Do we go to church on Sunday, asking forgiveness for our personal sins and then on Monday help make or carry out decisions that may be harmful to workers, or increase poverty, or pollute the environment? Do we completely ignore the effect our decisions have on the other beings we share this world with, the many people of other cultures and traditions and political entities, and also God's other creatures, the birds, fish, animals and plants?

We Christians are called to do better than that. How do we challenge our own society and our own culture to think not only about our individual failures, but our society's failure to live out Jesus' commandment to love, to have compassion, to care for others?

We need a new paradigm, a new way of understanding our own tradition in our present day.

We need to look deeply into our own tradition with a new lens and learn to speak and think in new ways. What does salvation mean in our time? What are the questions we need to ask to bring ourselves to conversion once again?

We are facing huge challenges today, including the global economic crisis, global warming and climate change. These are not issues we will be facing in the future. They are here now.

These are not issues we are facing as individuals, we face them together, all peoples and nations in the world.

Where and how can we find common ground with others in our society, both Christians of other traditions and non-Christians?

We the world's people, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, people of many other indigenous traditions, we all need to look into our spiritual traditions to learn to speak and think in new ways. We need to find common ground.

Each of the world's great religious traditions has much to offer to others. For example, in Jewish tradition there is the concept of 'tikkun olam', which means 'repairing the world'. This is a gift the Jews offer to us and it is based on our common tradition of creation where God calls everything God creates "good."

In the Quran, Islam's sacred text, men and women are viewed as God's vicegerents on Earth. God created nature in a balance ("al-mizan") and mankind's responsibility is to maintain this fragile equilibrium through wise governance and sound personal conduct. This is also based on our common tradition of God's creation. As the Quran states: "And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers; and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two; He draweth the night as a veil over the Day." (2)

One last example, here in the United States we find in most Native American traditions an emphasis on community, on sharing of resources,

and living in harmony with other creatures on earth. These are among many gifts that may be offered to the rest of us by our Indian brothers and sisters.

Who are the prophets challenging us to think in new ways? Let us listen to them and respond out of our deep tradition of God's love for all of creation.

Who are those bearing the gifts we need to find salvation for the whole world? May we of different traditions ask each other the deep questions, engage with each other and share in our response to the many challenges that lie ahead.

And remember we have God's Holy Spirit to guide us.

Amen.

1 [Feasting on the Word](#), Year A, Vol 2, Sixth Sunday of Easter, Westminster John Knox Press, 2010

2 From an article on 'Islam and Earth Day' by Joshua Brockwell, Council on American-Islamic Relations, website

