

May 17, 2020 – the 6th Sunday of Easter
“The Greatest Gift” – John 14:15-21(NRSV)
Pastor Darwin

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ 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.

John 14:18 “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ 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.”

What is the greatest gift you have ever received? Yes, I know many of us will rightly say: love, mother, father, spouse, children, a special friend, Jesus or maybe a pet. Besides those, think back to your childhood or other points in your life. Was it received on a special occasion – Christmas or your birthday – or just an ordinary day? Personally, I find it very hard to come up with one particularly special tangible gift, but I will speak of a few.

Though not very politically correct in today’s world, I enjoyed playing cowboys and Indians as well as playing soldier/army. Special Christmas gifts I received included cap guns like the famous “Fanner 50” toy cap gun and holster. Other toy guns include: “Shoot-n-shell” pistol, Paladin’s gun and holster, “The Rifleman’s,” rifle, Steve McQueen’s “Mare’s Leg/Winchester Randall”, Roy Rogers and “Hop-a-Long Cassidy’s” twin guns and holsters and Wyatt Earp’s ‘Buntline Special.’ I remember the Christmas I received a cap-firing machine gun. I had to have several boxes of caps for that weapon. You might believe that I’m a violent person after reviewing that list, but it was my ‘play world’ created by comic books and the first television we received in 1953.

My first 24” bicycle was very special as it expanded my territory and allowed me to travel beyond the confines of our yard and small town. However, as is probably the same with you, the most treasured gifts weren’t physical but spiritual. In my childhood, it was the love given by my parents. We attended church together every time the doors were open – and even when they weren’t to help with the maintenance of the property. Every Wednesday summer afternoon, my father would close his grocery store, work in the garden and then take us fishing. Also, there were those special trips to ‘the movies,’ or ‘McCrary 5 & 10 cent store’ for a hot dog with slaw and their special condiments. It was about our parents’ love for us and spending time with us. Today, I have keepsakes that belonged to my parents and other special friends that continues to stimulate my memory of them – my father’s Bible, family pictures, a pocket knife, pieces of furniture and some of my mother’s cookware. I cherish several mementos that remind me of those special ones ‘abiding within me’.

In today's Gospel lesson we continue to read from the Farewell Discourse – Jesus' last meal with the disciples until his resurrection. As we have inferred from the context, he is attempting to comfort his followers who are finally beginning to comprehend that the Messiah they follow is going to leave them. Last week I made the statement that most of this discourse is more about the ascended life, than the resurrected life. Christ is prophesying that in a little while, they will be without him, though for a short time. And when he does leave, he is going to prepare a dwelling place for them, making their relationship with the Godhead more intimate.

Jesus tells them that *'if you love me, you will keep my commandments.'* I believe the following verse (14:16) is filled with God's love for humanity. ¹⁶*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.* God has always loved his creation and creatures, even when we disobey. God attempted to live among humans in the Garden of Eden, but the humans wanted to control their own destiny. Afterwards, the Creator sent the only begotten Son, Jesus and we rejected him as well. In this verse, the words 'another Advocate,' are tell-telling. You're probably familiar with the Greek word we pronounce 'Paraclete.' It is interpreted several ways – Advocate, Comforter, Helper, Companion, or One who will 'walk alongside you.' Notice that Jesus says he will ask the Father to send "another Advocate." By using the adjective 'another,' Jesus is calling himself, his ministry, his leadership an advocate. Jesus is the first Paraclete. Now that Jesus is leaving, he promises his followers that if they love him and keep his commandments the second Advocate will be sent to them. They will not be alone. As we discover, this Paraclete is the Holy Spirit. *"And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"* John 20:22. This is Jesus' promised gift that he asked of the Father – the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity.

What does that mean for us? It means that God lives within us. Jesus did not abandon the disciple or us. It means that Jesus lives within us. The Paraclete, *'the one that comes along side us,'* is the new reality that the Word, the Truth and the Life abide with us forever. The Advocate interprets the ministry of Jesus, teaches us the will of God and comforts us in times like this. The Advocate makes possible and seals our relationship with the Father and the entire Godhead. Remember Isaiah 7:14; 8:8 and Matthew 1:23 – the prophecies of "Immanuel – God with us?" God is with us at all times and especially during this season of the pandemic. No matter what happens, God is with us. The Holy Spirit lives within us. We have not been orphaned, we have been adopted. Put your faith and trust in God. We have another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God in three person. Therefore, when one lives within us, all live within us.

Hear these words again: *John 14:18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that **I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.** ²¹ 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."*

Praise God, from whom all blessing flow! Amen.