

Last Sunday and this our reading is from the Gospel according to John. These verses come after Jesus had washed the feet of his followers, after the Passover Seder that we call the last supper, after Judas had left to turn his master in to the authorities. And now in what follows, it was as though Jesus' was giving the disciples a cram course, summing up his three years of teaching them, to show how that can serve as guidance for them after he has gone.

The disciples all felt that some kind of storm was coming, and they were terrified of losing Jesus, of losing their way. He was both comforting them and pointing to the road ahead. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you....I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

I think it would be fair to see the situation of those disciples as something like our own in this time of pandemic. Their world was turning upside down, as ours has. It was all very well for Jesus to say that he would ask the Father to send them another Advocate, but that doesn't translate easily.

The disciples could no longer imagine that they saw the future ahead of them. We as well seem bereft of an image of what might come next. But it is clear that it will be different from what came before, and we don't know when we will be in the next place, if ever.

I did hear on NPR this morning that churches might be able to re-open for worship if we did things

like taking reservations so there wouldn't be too many of us present at once; and we might need to receive communion in the form of wafers which would be individually wrapped. (The member of the Altar Guild to whom I am closest immediately said that would never happen.)

So as we stumble around in the dark, sad and anxious and without a road map, perhaps we should ask if Jesus has sent us an Advocate. The Greek word which John uses here is 'Paraclete'. Commentators give different translations of this word, so I decided I would check on Google to see if I could find an original meaning. And the very first thing that popped up was: 'Paraclete – have you checked on E-bay?' To which my answer was, "No, no I haven't. I would have no idea how much to bid for one."

The word Advocate calls to mind a defense attorney, or legal council. But perhaps a better sense would be 'one who comes alongside to accompany.' That would seem to meet our present need – to be accompanied by one who is as near as our next breath. For regardless of translation, Paraclete refers to The Holy Spirit, the very breath of God. Have we, in our time of dislocation, looked for the leading of the Spirit to help us find our way?

This is made more difficult by our tendency, as a commentator put it, to overlook the one she refers to as "the shy member of the trinity". Often our image of the Trinity is like a football game where God the

Father plays the first half alone, God the Son shows up in the third quarter, with the Spirit coming off the bench for the end.

But in point of fact all three persons of the Trinity have been present, together and creating, since the very beginning. If we become more willing to ask the Spirit to breathe with our breath, to light in us the fire of God's call, perhaps our waiting would become more hopeful.

Jesus describes the coming advocate as the 'Spirit of Truth'. The word in Greek is *aletheia* which means 'not forgetting'. But we so often conspire with our culture in forgetting that God has a vision and a role for us which we have not yet reached.

In normal times there had seemed to be so many other things calling for our energy and attention that it was sometimes hard to remember where the center is. But in this time of pandemic, much of that has been shut away, and there is greater space for quiet and reflection. Perhaps the fruit of all that we endure now can be a fresh opening to The Spirit who leads us toward an entirely renewed proclamation of Life and Truth.

In the words of the poet Rumi:

"It must be said. There are eyes that see into eternity. A presence beyond the power and magic of shamans. Let that in. Sink to the floor, full prostration."

May we indeed let this in, and bow in deepest worship to our God – Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Then our eyes can begin to see into eternity, and from our worship we may hear our call forward. Then we can wait in patience for the way into our future.