



The Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)
May 17, 2020
John 14;15-21
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

A week ago, Saturday, my washing machine just stopped mid-cycle. The tub was full of water, and there were sheets and towels in it. It was a new experience for me, as I don't recall ever having a washing machine just stop.

I went online to do research which showed how to reset the machine's timer or something to that effect. I followed the instructions several times as well as checked the fuse box. Once re-set, it would run for about two minutes and then just stop. Finally, it gave up its spirit.

I called an appliance repair service. The repair service was booked solid until the following Wednesday. In the meantime, I went to work scooping out gallons and gallons of water, ringing out wet sheets and towels not completely washed and hoped for the best.

The repair person came and worked his magic. Once he completed the repair, we had a conversation about the Bible and Church. He had overheard a conversation between Megan and me which led to our conversation.

I told him where I served as a priest, and he said that he had proposed to his wife at St. Mark's several years ago. He professed to be a committed Christian which then sparked a lengthy and engaging conversation. The conversation was energetic, meaningful and life-giving at least for me. In our conversation, I made it clear that at St. Mark's, we respect the dignity and beliefs of 'all' people.

A mantra which I often profess is that God loves 'all' people equally and without condition. How? Because it would not be in God's nature to not love God's own creation. That perception of God is not always consistent with the perception of God by some people. There are many people who believe in a notion of a God of vengeance and destruction.

Of late, I have heard some people say that the pandemic is God's doing and unleashed because of 'way of the world' or something like that. Can you imagine Jesus saying that his Father would intentionally allow hundreds of thousands of adults and children to be stricken down by a disease out of God's wrath and indignation toward humanity? I can't and hope that you can't as well. A reminder to us all that the First Letter of John tells us that "God is love". (I John 4:8)

Today's Gospel contains the word, love, in many places. The Gospel of John is sometimes referred to as the Gospel of Love, the love of God in and through Jesus. The Christian Scriptures tell us that Jesus came in to the world to bring about a new understanding and appreciation for God. John 13: 34 reminds us, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you, so also you must love one another."

For me, Jesus represents the embodiment of that love, as he accompanies us on our journey in life just as he accompanied the first disciples. He called the disciples from their previous occupations in life to follow him and give of themselves for the 'Good News' of the Gospel.

Jesus told them that the time was coming that he would return to the Father and would send another advocate in his place. That advocate from the Greek, Paraclete, (*Parakletos*) would accompany them and all who believe.

Two Sundays from now, we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, on Pentecost Sunday. It is the Holy Spirit of God who accompanies us each and every moment of life. During these days of the pandemic, I believe we need to be conscious of the Spirit of God within us, through us and all around us in ways perhaps like never before.

A commentator on today's Gospel said, "The promise of the *paraclete* suggests that essential to Christian leadership is not a set of skills but being a consistent presence... God's accompaniment is reiterated in those times when God's presence appears to be most needed or most questioned. It seems that accompaniment becomes necessary especially in periods of vulnerability, fear, and uncertainty... It is a kind of accompaniment that is about recognizing that this moment might indicate a theological crisis: Is God really here? Accompaniment... embodies who Jesus was for his disciples and then who the Holy Spirit was, and is, for believers, both then and now." (Karoline Lewis, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5433>)

My hope is that you believe that we at St. Mark's, clergy, staff and numerous ministries, are doing what we can to accompany you during these challenging times. We are working hard to be God's 'virtual presence' until at which time we can gather again at St. Mark's.

We do what we do out of love for God and love for one another. The Gospel shines a bright light on that 'way of love', as we accompany one another and walk together as a family of faith.

May we all know of God's love and abiding presence through the Holy Spirit especially during this time in life. We do *not* walk alone. We *are* not alone. God is in us, through us and all around us as the community of faith we call, St. Mark's. That gives me hope, and I pray it gives you hope as well. Amen.